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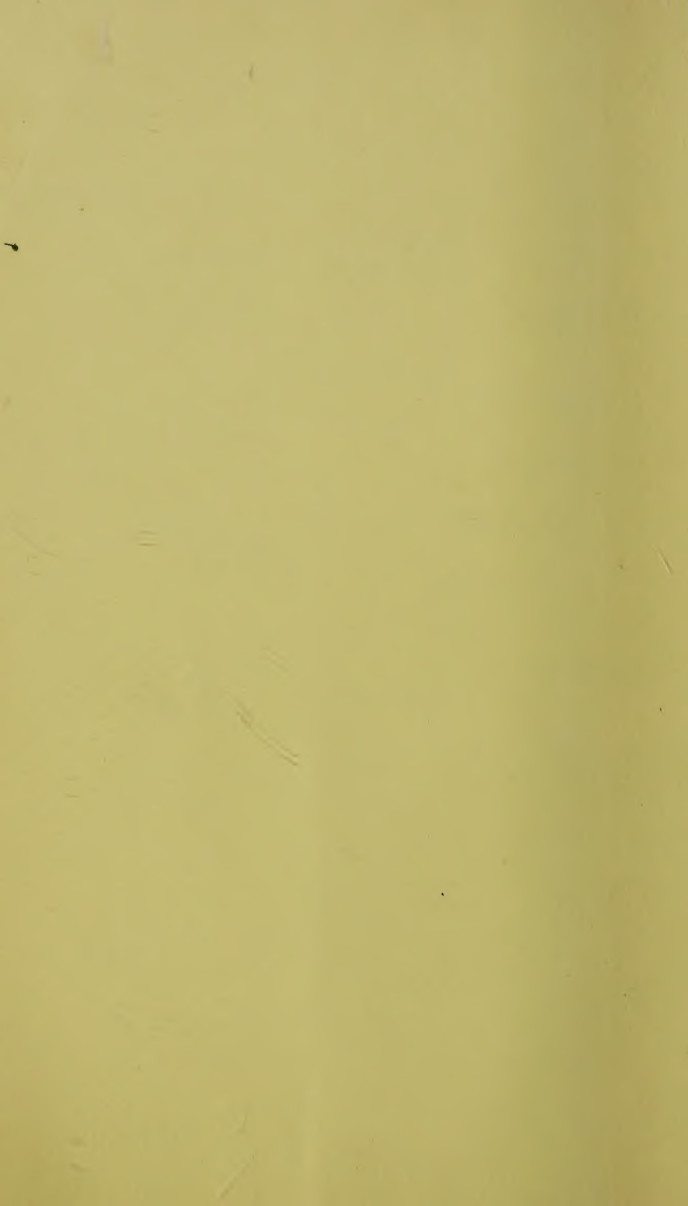
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Best Detective Stories

edited

119826

with an introduction

by

EDMUND CRISPIN

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Introduction

EDMUND CRISPIN

People are always pronouncing the doom of the detective story. It is a sort of melancholy-madness which seizes them in generation after generation like a recurring gene, and which appears to flourish quite independently of common sense and even of simple observation. At present its chief exponent is Mr. Julian Symons. Before the war there was Miss Dorothy Sayers. *The Moonstone*, as is well known, was said at the time of its publication to represent quite certainly the *genre's* dying gasp. And although I possess no actual record of the fact, it seems to me very probable that with the ink still wet on the manuscript of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, well-wishers were already advising Edgar Allan Poe to drop all that kind of rubbish and go into some business which had a future to it.

Yet still the thing survives: publishers and the public—oblivious, poor souls, of the satiety which by rights ought to have finally choked them off somewhere around 1890—persist in issuing and purchasing orthodox detective fiction with an enthusiasm which would probably surprise the doom-dealers if they could ever be persuaded to give the matter a moment's thought. Mrs. Christie still has butter to put on her bread. Mr. Carr seems confident of being able to continue supporting his wife and family. There is happily no hint from America that Mr. Queen is feeling the pinch. True, we are not, nowadays, getting quite such a quantity of this particular type of crime fiction as we got before the war. But this I believe to be a healthy sign rather than the reverse, in that the drifting, opportunist variety of writer who tinkered with orthodox detective fiction at the time when it was the dominant crime-story form has now abandoned it in favour

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of the thriller, or the so-called psychological crime tale, or the *soi-disant* "naturalistic" murder story, all of which are not only intellectually fashionable at the moment, but also (as it happens) very much easier to write. In short, the *genre* has got rid of its catchpenny hangers-on, and is all the better for that. Restricted output, in this case, is far from being a symptom of restricted demand. A distinguished publisher recently told me that in his opinion the demand for this kind of writing greatly exceeded the supply. And judging from the complaints which assault my ears whenever a friend or acquaintance gets a crime book out of the library, and finds himself confronted yet again with the painstakingly visualised details and antecedents of some banal Sunday-newspaper type of crime, I think that the aforesaid publisher was certainly right.

There is of course no reason on earth why if a writer is temperamentally inclined to present crime in a more or less naturalistic fashion he should not do so. Mr. Julian Symons, our most formidable advocate and exponent of this sort of thing, seems to feel that the doing so must inevitably make orthodox detective fiction obsolete. But in my view he is mistaken about that. For it must be obvious, surely, that these two species of tale evoke in the reader two quite separate and distinct varieties of enjoyment. And if this is granted then plainly the one can no more supersede the other than oysters can supersede bread, or *vice versa*. The analogy here is fairly close. We are most of us capable of eating bread at every meal. On the other hand we should most of us balk at the idea of thus perpetually swallowing oysters. In the same way, we may relish, from time to time, an acute, serious, uncomfortably "true" story about a murder. But only from time to time. For if we were to read such stories (or write them, come to that) with any frequency, we should at once convict ourselves of disproportion, of being unhealthily obsessed with an eccentric human activity which the majority of people never encounter at first hand during the whole of their lengthy progress from the cradle to the grave. Only by making a game of it, by shifting it to a level perceptibly artificial, patently *removed* from reality—only in this way can we decently allow the squalid divagations of the mad or the anti-social to provide regular matter for our entertainment.

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Thus defined, orthodox detective fiction would seem at a first glance to be guilty of treating serious matters frivolously. Not so. Analyse the stuff attentively, and you will find that in spite of the superficial appearances, it scarcely ever deals with serious matters at all. Crime is a serious matter, yes; and yet, odd as this may sound, crime is not primarily what orthodox detective fiction is about. Orthodox detective fiction is about *mystery*—a rather different matter. Crime comes into it for the reason that the moment you make up your mind to brighten people's lives with a mystery of some sort, you are brought face to face with the fact that what humanity is most resolutely mysterious about is its misdeeds; which being so, you can scarcely help having a crime in your story. That crime, however, will be purely a pretext. Like the Point in Euclid, it will have position but no magnitude. You must remember to put it in (preferably somewhere near the beginning), because otherwise you will have no means of engendering your true subject-matter, namely the mystery and its solution. But you will not, of course, be so grossly imprudent as to allow it to become an object of more than moderate interest in itself.

For in this lies the whole art of the orthodox detective story. Its *raison d'être* is plot; and any element which is permitted to overshadow plot will weaken the effect of the whole, throwing it off balance and producing an ambiguous hybrid. It is for this reason that attempts to elevate the tone of the *genre*, by way of better characterisation or greater plausibility or what not, so consistently fail in achieving their object. The elevating media are incapable of operating except at the expense of the plot—so that in due course this withers away, leaving the reformer writing quite a different *sort* of book. That way went E. C. Bentley, Dorothy Sayers, John Franklin Bardin; while currently Mr. Raymond Postgate, and Mr. Symons, are both well advanced in the same enterprise.

Let us be quite clear about this. Orthodox detective fiction is in its essence artificial, contrived and fantastic. In trying to make it less artificial, contrived and fantastic you do not improve it: you simply cease to write it—just as you would cease to write suspense stories if a feeling of placidity were what you were aiming at. Naturally, a large part of the detective-story writer's art consists in giving his plot

an *appearance* of life. The machinery must not only work beautifully; it must also be reasonably attractive to the eye. The precise nature of this attractiveness will depend on the taste and temperament of the author, and may even—as for example with Mr. Roy Vickers—involve a considerable degree of naturalism. Mr. Vickers, however, being a fine craftsman, knows perfectly well that the proper place for the cart is behind the horse, not in front of it. His abundant and convincing detail is in fact very strictly—and very properly—controlled and directed by the requirements of his plot; despite the fact that his interest in the “inverted” type of detective story frees him to a great extent from the special obligations imposed on those who write their mysteries the other way round, he remains, like all good exponents of the *genre*, predominantly an artificer. And that, of course, is the way we want him to be. It is an error to suppose either that people are incapable of enjoying frank artifice, or that if they do enjoy it, they are being puerile. Were that really so, we should be obliged to believe that some of the most considerable intellects of our time have been content in their leisure moments to resort repeatedly, for relaxation, to something that is intrinsically quite valueless: a supposition which I, for one, find it impossible to accept.

At the same time, the word artifice does undoubtedly carry certain more or less pejorative overtones. In the eighteenth century it used to be held that art's chief aim is imitating nature; and if there is any truth at all in this, then clearly detective fiction *is* artifice, rather than art. The giving of aesthetic pleasure, however, is by no means confined exclusively to the arts: it is also a by-product of various human activities whose primary aim is something quite different. And here again an analogy will be helpful. The designing of bridges is first and foremost a functional business—which is to say that given the choice we would all of us rather have a stable, ugly bridge than a handsome one which sagged in the middle. Yet the combination of these two desiderata, workability and attractiveness, is by no means impossible. It may be difficult, may indeed be a matter of luck rather than of judgment; still, now and again it does in fact happen. And so it is with orthodox detective fiction. The *genre* is *par excellence* literary engineering. Like a bridge, it is capable of offering

genuine aesthetic pleasure; but this pleasure must be epiphenomenal. The author who neglects structural soundness in pursuit of it does so at his extreme peril—for no matter how putatively fine his embellishments may be, they will certainly excite derision rather than admiration if the framework which carries them is three-quarters submerged beneath the estuary.

In brief, we can say, paraphrasing le Corbusier, that a detective story is a machine for reading in. Naturally it must also be a great deal more than that, else no one would ever be bothered with it at all; all I am propounding here is the inexorable law of function which insists that the "more" must never, in any circumstances, be permitted to interfere with the machine. This, for the writer, involves a sense of balance so sure and immitigable that it is little wonder if he sometimes fails. To offer practically nothing over and above the machine, as the late Freeman Wills Crofts was apt to do, is worthy but undeniably rather dull. To offer too much over and above it—and here I may perhaps be allowed to instance my own books—gives results which are confusing and distracting. The ideal method, probably, is to make the non-plot interest of your story a secondary facet of plot, as for example by embodying a clue in a sentence which by way of bonus is an excellent piece of atmospheric or humorous writing in its own right. But to do this sort of thing consistently, throughout the length of a novel, is stupendously hard. It calls not only for what is sometimes described as "mere" ingenuity,¹ but also for the most meticulous premeditation and planning before a single word is put on paper. In this planning, moreover, necessary though it undoubtedly is, there lurk fearful dangers—for instance, the risk that the plot may become overwrought or complex to a ridiculous degree, as also the risk that with so much already pre-ordained, the actual narrative will fail to convey the proper feeling of ease and spontaneity. Still, with luck and talent and severe self-criticism it is occasionally possible to avoid the worst of such pitfalls. Among short stories, where the machinery is as a rule much less complex than in

¹ Detective-story writers who have listened to otherwise perfectly intelligent friends expounding what they believe to be viable plots for detective stories come to feel, in the course of time, that there is perhaps something not quite accurate about this epithet.

a novel, the proportion of successes is probably as high as ten per cent.

What it boils down to is this: that the fully evolved detective story is technically by far the trickiest form of fiction humanity has so far devised. For we have come to demand of it not only a mystery with a plausible solution, but over and above that a mystery with a surprise solution; and over and above *that*, a mystery with a surprise solution which by rights we ought not to have been surprised at at all.¹ I am not, of course, to be understood as implying that because orthodox detective fiction is inordinately difficult to do well, it is therefore, *ipso facto*, inordinately well worth doing. Walking across Niagara Falls on a tight-rope is inordinately difficult to do; but we do not for that reason cherish Niagara Falls tight-rope walkers above all other men. No, the case for orthodox detective fiction depends on the fact that most of us get great satisfaction out of contemplating, now and again, a piece of virtuoso literary *contrivance*. Why this should be so I have no idea. None the less, it is so. And far from repining, we addicts ought to be grateful that the gods have given us minds eclectic enough to accommodate this specialised variety of literary pleasure along with all the others.

In conclusion, it is perhaps worth making brief reference to the social and ethical effects of the *genre*. Unlike certain other varieties of crime story, orthodox detective fiction is not morbid. In part this is because, as I have already suggested, crime as such is not its principal concern (a fact which regularly gives the impercipient their cue for jibes about characterless corpses on library carpets). And in part it is because the *genre* is patently—you might almost say ostentatiously—artificial, so that no one above the level of a moron ever seriously imagines for a single moment that this is what crime in real life is like. But there is more. In at least one respect I believe

¹ It is perhaps worth noting here that this business of fair play to the reader, of giving him throughout the narrative the evidence which *ought* to enable him to anticipate the solution, is not so much a matter of sportsmanship as of art. It avoids the feeling of arbitrariness which is evoked in us by a surprise ending not demonstrably conditioned by all that has gone before. For examples of the disappointing—because totally unprepared—type of surprise ending, see *Trent's Last Case*, or more recently Mr. Julian Symons' *The Colour of Murder*.

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that orthodox detective fiction has a positive and unique contribution to make to our ethics. A recent newspaper article defined this contribution by suggesting that the paucity of detective fiction in Soviet Russia may well be due to its monotonous insistence on strict judicial *proof* of guilt—an insistence which incidentally spotlights the fact that a prepared surprise ending is superior to an arbitrary one morally as well as artistically. The point is admirably reiterated—in slightly different terms, but to the same end—in Miss Charlotte Armstrong's story in this collection. And I know that if I were to come home to my wife one evening with a fresh red stain on my handkerchief, a strange blonde hair on my lapel and an aura of somebody else's perfume—and a perfectly innocent reason for all these phenomena—I should feel a good deal more hopeful of the outcome if she were a regular reader of detective fiction than if she were not. In real life, the obvious explanation is of course often the correct one. But not always. And Occam's Razor suits our laziness and our passions so well that it is no bad thing, in my opinion, for us to do some of our reading in a *genre* which enjoins scepticism, and the necessity of always looking for an explanation which though not the obvious explanation may none the less be the true one; which preaches that evidence is always to be preferred to intuition or prejudice; which in its modest way is forever telling us that jumping to conclusions is *not*, in an animal gifted with the ability to reason, either a very creditable or a very useful *modus vivendi*.

An editor whose anthology-title contains the word "best", and whose contents list includes an item with which he personally has been concerned, owes his readers a word of explanation, to say the least of it. For the writing, characters and ambient of *Who Killed Baker?* I alone am responsible. But I have ventured to hope that readers will be prepared to suffer these things for the sake of the really brilliantly ingenious idea embodied in them; and for this idea the whole of the credit must go to my collaborator, Dr. Geoffrey Bush.

Dead Man's Shoes

MICHAEL INNES

Catching the eight-five had meant an early start for Derry Fisher. A young man adept at combining pleasure with business, he had fallen in with some jolly people in the seaside town to which his occasions had briefly taken him, and on his last night he had been dancing into the small hours. As a result of this he was almost asleep now—and consequently at a slight disadvantage when the panting and wide-eyed girl tumbled into his compartment. This was a pity. It was something that had never happened to him before.

"Please . . . I'm so sorry. . . . I only——" The girl, who seemed of about Derry's own age, was very pretty and very frightened. "A man——" Again speech failed her, and she swayed hazardingly on her feet. "You see, I was alone, and——"

But by this time Derry had collected himself and stood up. "I'm afraid you've been upset," he said. "Sit down and take it easy. Nothing more can happen now."

The girl sat down—but not without a glance around the empty compartment. Derry guessed that she badly felt the need of some person of her own sex. "Thank you," she said.

This time she had tried to smile as she spoke. But her eyes remained scared. It suddenly occurred to Derry that part of the nastiness of what had presumably happened must be in its anonymous quality. "My name is Derry Fisher," he said. "I work for an estate agent in London, and I've been down to Sheercliff on a job. I caught this train so as to be back in the office after lunch."

Whether or not the girl took in this prosaic information Derry was unable to tell. Certainly she did not, as he had hoped, do

anything to supply her own biography. Instead, she produced a handkerchief and blew her nose. Then she asked a question in a voice still barely under control. "I suppose I must look an utter fool?"

Derry resisted the temptation to say that, on the contrary, she looked quite beautiful. It mightn't, in the circumstances, be in terribly good taste. So he contented himself with shaking his head. "Not a bit," he said. "And I wish I could help in any way. Did you have any luggage in the compartment you had to leave? If you did, may I fetch it for you?"

"Thank you very much." The girl appeared steadied by this unexciting proposal. "I have a green suit-case, and the compartment is the last one in this coach. But first I should tell you about . . . about the man."

Derry doubted it. He knew that, unless the man had been so tiresome that he ought to be arrested, it would be wise that no more should be said. The girl could tell her mother or her best friend later in the day. She would only regret blurting things out to a strange young man. "Look here," he said, "I wouldn't bother about the chap any more—not unless you feel it's only fair to other people to bring in the police at Waterloo. In that case, I'll see the guard. But at the moment, I'll fetch the suit-case. And you can think it over."

"I don't think you understand."

Derry paused, his hand already on the door to the corridor. "I beg your pardon?"

"Please stop—please listen." The girl gave a sharp laugh that came out unexpectedly and rather uncomfortably. "I see I've been even more of a fool than I thought. You've got the . . . the wrong impression. The man didn't——" Suddenly she buried her face in her hands and spoke savagely from behind them. "It was nothing. I imagined it. I must be hysterical."

Derry, who had sat down again, kept quiet. He knew that women do sometimes get round to imagining things. This girl didn't seem at all like that. But no doubt it was a trouble that sometimes took hold of quite unexpected people.

"I mean that I imagined its *importance*. I certainly didn't imagine the *thing*. Nobody could have a . . . a hallucination of that sort." As

if nerving herself, the girl put her hands down and looked straight at Derry. "*Could* they?"

It was Derry who laughed this time—although he could scarcely have told why. "Look here," he said. "I think I *have* misunderstood. What was it?"

"It was his shoes." For a moment the girl's glance was almost helpless, as if she was aware of the absurd anti-climax that this odd statement must produce. "It was something about his shoes."

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The engine shrieked, and the express plunged into a tunnel. In the wan electric light which had replaced the early summer sunshine, Derry stared at the girl blankly. "You mean—this isn't about anything that . . . *happened*?"

"No—or yes and no." For a moment the girl appeared to struggle for words. Then she squared herself where she sat. "May I tell you the whole thing?"

"Please do—I'm awfully curious." Derry spoke sincerely. The story, whatever it might be, was not going to be an awkward chronicle of attempted impropriety. "You did say *shoes*?"

"Yes. A brown shoe and a black one."

The train had returned to daylight. This did not prevent Derry Fisher from a sensation of considerable inner darkness. "You mean that this man——"

"Yes. He is wearing one brown shoe and one black. . . . How incredibly trivial it sounds."

"I don't know. It's not a thing one ever sees."

"Exactly!" The girl looked gratefully at Derry. "And when you see it, it gives you a shock. But the real shock was when *he* saw that *I* saw it. You see?"

Derry smiled. "Not really. Hadn't you better start at the beginning?"

"The beginning was at Sheercliff. I thought I'd only just catch the train myself, but this man cut it even finer than I did. He tumbled in just as we moved off. With any sort of baggage, he couldn't have managed it. But he has nothing but a brief-case."

"Is he tidily dressed apart from this business of the shoes?"

The girl considered. "He certainly isn't noticeably untidy. But what chiefly strikes me about his clothes is that they look tremendously expensive. He's in the sort of tweeds that you could tell a mile off, and that must be terribly good if they're not to be ghastly."

"Is he a loud sort of person himself?"

"Not a bit. He's middle-aged and intellectual looking, and quite clearly one of nature's First Class passengers. I think he jumped into a Third in a hurry and hasn't bothered to change. He simply put his brief-case down beside him—there were only the two of us in the compartment—and disappeared behind *The Times*. I had a book, and I didn't do much more than take a glance at him. It wasn't perhaps for half an hour that I noticed the shoes. They gave me a jar, as I've said. And although I went on reading, the queerness of it stuck in my head. So presently I had another look, just to make sure I hadn't been mistaken. And as I looked, *he* looked. That is to say, he happened to glance over *The Times*, saw the direction of my eyes, and followed it. What he discovered was a terrific shock to him. His legs jerked as if he'd been stung, and his feet made a futile effort to disappear beneath the seat. I looked up in surprise, and just caught a glimpse of his face before he raised *The Times* again. He had gone a horrible grey, as if he was going to be sick. It made me feel a bit sick myself. And matters didn't improve when he turned chatty."

"But not, surely, about the shoes?"

"Yes, about the shoes. He put down his paper and apologised for them—just as if the compartment was . . . was my drawing-room and he felt that he had come into it too casually dressed."

"He made a kind of joke of it?"

"That was what he seemed to intend. But he was very nervous. He was smoking those yellow cigarettes—aren't they called Russian?—and he kept stubbing out one and lighting another. He asked me if the shoes made him look like an absent-minded professor."

"And what did you say to that?" Derry guessed that it was doing the girl good to talk about her queer encounter. And it sounded merely eccentric rather than sinister. Presently she ought to be able to see it as that.

"I said it didn't. I said it didn't, somehow, look a thing of which absent-mindedness would be the explanation. I said it *ought* to; that it was the sort of thing one might make an absent-minded person do in a story; but that when one actually *saw* it, that just didn't seem to fit."

Derry Fisher smiled. "You gave him quite good value for his money. It was what might be called a considered reply."

"Perhaps. But he didn't like it." To Derry's surprise the girl's agitation was growing again. "I suppose I was tactless to do more than murmur vaguely. He stubbed out another cigarette, and I felt a queer tension suddenly established between us. It was a horrid sensation. And what he said next didn't at all ease it. He said I was quite right, and that he wasn't at all absent-minded. He was colour-blind."

Derry was puzzled. "That's certainly a bit odd. But I don't see——"

"I happened to know that it was almost certainly nonsense."

This time the girl sounded slightly impatient; and Derry decided, quite without resentment, that she was cleverer than he was. "I'm not absolutely certain that colour-blindness of that sort doesn't exist. But I know that anything other than the ordinary red-green kind is excessively rare. So this was a very tall story. And, of course, I had another reason for disbelieving him. Wouldn't you agree?"

Derry stared. "I'm afraid I don't at all know."

"If this man *is* unable to distinguish between black and brown, he couldn't possibly have received such a shock the moment his glance fell on his shoes. Don't you see?"

"Yes—of course." Derry felt rather foolish. "And what happened then?"

"This time I didn't say anything. I felt, for some reason, really frightened. And I was even more frightened when I detected him cautiously trying the handle of the door."

"The door to the corridor?"

"No. The door on the other side."

Derry Fisher, although not brilliant, had a quick instinct for the moment at when action was desirable. "Look here," he said, "it's about time I had a look." And with a reassuring glance at his companion, he rose and stepped into the corridor.

They were moving at speed, and had been doing so steadily since some time before the beginning of his encounter with the frightened girl. He walked up the train in the direction she had indicated, glancing into each compartment as he passed. In one there was a group of young airmen, mostly asleep; in another a solitary lady of severe appearance seemed to be correcting examination papers; in a third an elderly clergyman and his wife were placidly chatting. Derry came to the last compartment and saw at a glance that it was empty.

Conscious of being both disappointed and relieved, he stepped inside. The girl's green suit-case was on the rack. On the opposite seat lay an unfolded copy of *The Times*. There were two or three yellow cigarette-butts on the floor. The window was up.

Derry felt obscurely prompted to make as little physical impact upon the compartment as might be. He picked up the suit-case and went out, shutting the corridor door behind him. The girl was sitting where he had left her, and he set the suit-case down beside her. "He's gone," he said.

"Gone! You don't think——"

"It's very unlikely that anything nasty has happened." Derry was reassuring. "The window is closed, and he couldn't have chucked himself out without opening the door. In that case, it would be open still. Nobody clinging to the side of the train could get it shut again, even if he wanted to. Your tiresome friend has just made off to another carriage. It's the end of him—but quite harmlessly."

"He could only have gone in the other direction, or we'd have seen him."

"That's perfectly true. But he naturally would go off in the opposite direction to yourself. And the greater length of the train lies that way. It's more crowded, too, at that end. He realises that he's made an ass of himself, and he's decided to submerge himself in the crush."

The girl nodded. "I suppose you're right. But I haven't really told you why I bolted." She hesitated. "It's too fantastic—too silly.

Dead Man's Shoes

I didn't think he had any notion of killing himself. I rather thought he was meaning to kill *me*." The girl laughed—and it was her unsteady laugh again. "Isn't it a disgusting piece of hysteria? It must mean that my unconscious mind just won't bear looking into."

"Rubbish." Derry felt it incumbent upon him to speak with some sternness. "This chap is a thoroughly queer fish. It was perfectly reasonable to feel that he might be quite irresponsible. You say he actually began fiddling with the door-handle?"

"Yes. And I really thought that he was thinking out what you might call two . . . two co-ordinated movements. Getting the door open and pitching me through it. And when I did get up and leave, I felt that it was a terrific crisis for him. I sensed that he was all coiled up to hurl himself at me—and that he decided in the last fraction of a second that it wouldn't do." The girl stood up. "But this is all too idiotic. And at least I already see it as that—thank goodness." She smiled rather wanly at Derry. "I shall go along and try the effect of a cup of coffee."

"May I come too?"

"I'd rather you didn't. But you've already been terribly kind. You've helped me to pull myself together. It's just that I feel I can finish the job better alone."

Left in solitude, Derry Fisher reflected that he had learnt very little about the girl herself—nothing at all, indeed, except the disturbing episode in which she had found herself involved. Might he, when she returned, ask her for her name—or at least attempt a more general conversation? The probability was that he would never see her again; and this was a fact which he found himself facing with lively dissatisfaction. Her appearance in his compartment had been after a fashion to make the imagination expect some further succession of strange events, some romantic sequel.

But when the girl did return, her own manner was notably prosaic. Coffee and reflection seemed further to have persuaded her that she had already dramatised an insignificant circumstance too much. She remained grateful and talked politely. But Derry guessed that she felt awkward, and that at Waterloo she would be glad to say good-bye, both to him and to the whole incident. So he forbore to make

any suggestion for the bettering of their acquaintance. Only when the train reached the terminus he insisted on accompanying her through the barrier and to the taxi-rank. The man who had scared her—the man with the black and brown shoes—must be somewhere in the crush; and if, as seemed likely, he was crazy, there was a possibility that he might bother her again. But they caught no sight of him.

The girl gave an address in Kensington and stepped into her cab. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you so much."

Derry took his dismissal with a smile—regretful, but with the feeling that he was doing the right thing. "Goodbye," he said. "At least, you're safe and sound."

Her eyes widened, and then laughed at him. "Yes, indeed. He can't despatch me now."

The cab moved off. Derry, stepping forward to wave regardless of the traffic, was nearly bowled over by one of the next cabs out; inside it, he glimpsed a man's amused face as he skipped nimbly to safety. He had been in danger, he saw, of making an ass of himself over that girl. He hurried off to catch a bus.

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Shortly after lunch Derry went in to see his uncle—at present his employer, and soon, he hoped, to be his partner. Derry sat on one corner of his uncle's desk—a privilege which made him feel slightly less juvenile and on the mat—and gave an account of himself. He described his few days at Sheercliff and his labours there on behalf of the firm.

His uncle listened with his customary mingling of scepticism and benevolent regard; and then proceeded to ask his customary series of mild but formidably searching questions. Eventually he moved to less austere ground. Had Derry got in any tennis? Had he found the usual agreeable persons to go dancing with? On these topics, too, Derry offered what were by now prescriptive replies, whereupon his uncle buried his nose in a file and gave a wave which Derry knew was to waft him from the room.

All this was traditional. But as he reached the door his uncle

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looked up again. "By the way, my dear boy, I see you left Sheercliff just before the sensation there."

"The sensation, Uncle?" Only vaguely interested, Derry saw his relative reach for a lunch-time newspaper.

"An unidentified body found on the rocks in mysterious circumstances—that sort of thing."

"Oh." Derry was not much impressed.

"And there was something rather unaccountable. Now, where did I see it?" Derry's uncle let his eye travel over the paper now spread out before him. "Yes—here it is. The body was fully dressed. But it was wearing one black shoe and one brown . . . My dear boy—are you ill? Too many late nights, if you ask me."

2

At nine o'clock that morning—it was his usual hour—Superintendent Lort had come on duty at Sheercliff police-station and found Captain Meritt waiting for him. The circumstance gave Lort very little pleasure. He was an elderly man, soon to retire; and he had felt from the first that Meritt belonged to a world that had passed beyond him. Meritt was an ex-army officer, and so to be treated with decent respect. His job was that of bodyguard—there could be no other name for it—to a certain Sir Stephen Borlase, who had been staying for some weeks at the Metropole Hotel. It was not apparent to Lort why Borlase should require other protection than that provided by the regular police. Meritt, it appeared, was paid by the great industrial concern whose principal research chemist Borlase was. But it was an important Ministry that had yanked Meritt out of one of the regular Security Services and seconded him to the job. Borlase's research, it seemed, was very much a work of national importance. And so there was this irregular arrangement. This *most* irregular arrangement, Lort said to himself now—and greeted his visitor with a discouraging glare.

"Borlase has vanished." Meritt blurted out the words and sat down uninvited. He looked like a man whose whole career is in the melting-pot. Probably it was.

"Vanished, sir? Since when?"

"Well, since last night—or rather very early this morning. I saw him then. But now he's gone. His bed hasn't been slept in."

"Do I understand, Captain Meritt, that it is part of your—um—employment to visit Sir Stephen Borlase's bedroom before nine a.m., and at once to communicate with the police if he isn't found there?"

"Of course not, man. The point is that he hasn't *slept* there. And that needs inquiring into at once."

"But surely, sir, such an inquiry is precisely what you are—er—paid for?"

"Certainly. But I naturally expect the help of the police." Meritt was plainly angry. "Borlase is a damned important man. He is working now on the devil knows what."

"That probably describes it very well." And Lort smiled grimly. "But are we to raise an alarm because this gentleman fails to sleep in his hotel? I know nothing of his habits. But the fact that he has been provided with a somewhat peculiar—um—companion in yourself, suggests to me that he may not be without a few quiet eccentricities."

"He's a brilliant and rather unstable man."

"I see. But this is not information that has been given us here in our humdrum course of duty. Do I understand it to be thought possible that Sir Stephen may bolt?"

Meritt visibly hesitated. "That's not for me to say. I am instructed merely to be on guard on his behalf. And *you*, Superintendent, if I am not mistaken, have been instructed to give me any help you can."

"I have been instructed, sir, to recognise your function and to co-operate. Very well. What, in more detail, is the position? And what do you propose should be done?"

"Part of the position, Superintendent, I think you already know. Sir Stephen is here as a convalescent, but in point of fact he can't be kept from working all the time. Apparently his stuff is so theoretical and generally rarefied that he can do it all in his head, so all he needs to have about him is a file or two and a few notebooks. He has been

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pottering about the beach and the cliffs during the day, as his doctors have no doubt told him to do. And then, as often as not, he has been working late into the night. It has made my job the deuce of a bore."

"No doubt, sir." Lort was unsympathetic. "And last night?"

"He sat up until nearly one o'clock. I have a room from which I can see his windows; and it has become my habit not to go to bed myself until he seems safely tucked up. You can judge from that how this job has come to worry me. Well, out went his lights in the end, and I was just about to undress when I heard him open the outer door of his suite. He went downstairs. It seemed to me I'd better follow; and when I reached the hall, there he was giving a nod to the night porter and walking out of the hotel. He hadn't changed for dinner, and in his tweeds he might have been a visitor leaving the place for good. He was merely bent, however, on a nocturnal stroll."

"It was a pleasant night, no doubt." Lort offered this comment impassively.

"Quite so. Sir Stephen's proceeding was no more than mildly eccentric. But if I'd let him wander off like that in the small hours, and if anything *had* happened, it would have been just too bad for both of us. So I took that stroll too—some fifty yards in the rear. He went straight through the town and took the short cliff path out to Merlin Head. It's an extremely impressive spot in full moonlight, with the sheer drop to the sea looking particularly awe-inspiring, I imagine. Of course there was nobody about. And as there is only the one narrow path to the Head, I didn't follow him to the end of it. He doesn't like being dogged around."

"I'm not surprised." Lort was emphatic. "I don't know what things are coming to that such antics should be considered necessary in a quiet place like this. But go on."

"You will remember that there's a little shelter on the verge of the Head, with a bench from which you can command the whole sweep of the bay. Borlase disappeared into that, but didn't sit for long. Within ten minutes he was making his way back towards me—and at that I slipped out of sight and followed him discreetly back to the hotel. Perhaps I should mention having a feeling that there was

something on his mind. His walk out to the Head had been direct and decisive. But on the way back he hesitated several times, as if doing a bit of wool-gathering. So I kept well in the background, and he had gone to his bedroom by the time I re-entered the hotel. I waited, as usual, until his lights were out, and then I turned in."

"And now, you say, he has vanished?"

"Yes. I've got into the way of taking him along his letters in the morning. That is how I've discovered that he never went to bed at all."

Lort frowned. "But you say all the lights went out in his suite? Could there have been one still burning when you went to bed yourself—one that wouldn't be visible to you?"

"I think not."

"And the night porter? Was he aware of Borlase's leaving again?"

"No. But he potters around a little, although not supposed to quit the hall. I doubt if it was difficult for Borlase to let himself out unobserved." Meritt paused. "And that, Superintendent, is the position now. What do you make of it?"

"I'm far from feeling obliged to make anything of it at all." Lort allowed himself some tartness in this reply. "Here is a man, devoted to abstruse scientific thought, who takes a reflective stroll at one o'clock in the morning. Moonlight doesn't help with whatever problem he's chewing over, so for a time he sits in the dark and tries that. Presently he wanders out again, and very probably walks till morning. Eventually he emerges from his abstraction, discovers himself to be uncommonly hungry, breakfasts at the first inn he sees, returns to Sheercliff at his leisure, and finds that the conscientious Captain Meritt has persuaded the police to start a manhunt." And Lort favoured his visitor with a bleak smile. "The truth may not be precisely that. But my guess is that I'm well within the target area."

"I see." Meritt had produced his watch and glanced at it. Now he put it away and turned a cold eye on the elderly and sardonic man before him. "And you think mine a very queer job?"

"I do, sir—decidedly."

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"And so it is, Superintendent. But then Borlase, as it happens, is a very queer man. Just how queer, I think I must now take the responsibility of telling you."

"I am very willing, sir, to hear anything that makes sense of your anxieties."

"Very well—here goes." Meritt paused as if to collect himself. "Perhaps I can best begin by repeating what I have just said—but with a difference. The Borlases are a very queer couple of men."

Lort stared. "You mean there is a brother—something like that?"

"I mean nothing of the sort. I mean that Sir Stephen Borlase—the man stopping at the Metropole Hotel—is much more easily understood as two people than as one."

Lort sat back in his chair. "Jekyll and Hyde?"

"Or Hyde and Jekyll. That is undoubtedly the popular expression of the thing, and perhaps the best for laymen like you and me, Superintendent, to hang on to. Or possibly we might think of him as a sort of Hamlet—the man who couldn't make up his mind."

"Frankly, sir, I don't find this easy to believe. I suppose Dr. Jekyll may have been a man of some scientific attainment, but I can't see Hamlet as an eminent research chemist."

"Perhaps not." Meritt took a moment to estimate the cogency of this pronouncement. "But the fact is that Borlase combines immense drive and concentration as a scientist with a highly unstable personality. Commonly his ideological convictions are very much those of any other man of his sort in our society. For the greater part of his days, that is to say, he is completely reliable. But every now and then he is subject to a fit of emotional and intellectual confusion, and from this there emerges for a short time what is virtually a different personality. It's an awkward thing in the days of the cold war, as you can see. Let certain folk effectively contact Borlase when he has swung over to this other polarity—this other set of values—and goodness knows what they might not get out of him. And now I think you can understand why I was given my job—and why I think the present situation genuinely alarming."

"I still feel, sir, that I've a good deal to learn." Lort was clearly preparing to plod doggedly round the queer story with which he had

been presented. "Am I to understand that Sir Stephen Borlase is fully aware of his own condition?"

"In a general way—yes. But he plays it down. When normal, he declines to admit that these periods of disturbance go, so to speak, at all deep. He won't treat himself as potentially a cot case. Nothing in the way of regular visits by the appropriate sort of medical man would be tolerated by him. So he has been persuaded that he is in the first flight of V.I.P.s—as indeed he pretty well is—and provided with——"

"—The new style of guardian angel represented by yourself." Lort, having given his cautious antagonism this further airing, reached for a scribbling-pad as if to indicate that the matter had entered a new phase. "Have you been given to understand that there does now exist against Borlase a specific threat? Are there, in fact, supposed to be persons aware of his condition and actively planning to exploit it?"

"It is thought very likely that there are—particularly a fellow called Krauss."

"I see. And you have been told what signs to look for in Borlase himself?"

"He is said to go moody, restless, distraught—that sort of thing."

Lort nodded. "What about the last few days? Has he appeared all right?"

"The devil of it is, Superintendent, that he has always appeared a bit of a queer fish to me. I can't claim to have noticed any change in the last few days."

"Then, Captain Meritt, it remains my guess that this is a false alarm. When did you leave the Metropole—half an hour ago? Likely enough, Borlase has returned in the interval. I'll call the place up and find out."

Two telephones stood on Lort's desk—and now, as he was in the act of reaching for one, the second emitted a low but urgent purr. The Superintendent picked it up. "Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Dead, you say? . . . *Where?*" Lort's glance, as he listened, fleetingly sought Meritt's face. "The *tide*? If that was so, you did perfectly right . . . Unidentified? I hope he remains so. . . . I said, I hope he remains

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so. . . . Never mind why. . . . Yes, of course—within ten minutes. . . . Thank you."

When Lort had snapped down the receiver, there was a moment's silence. Meritt had gone pale, and when he spoke it was with an odd striving for a casual note. "Not, I suppose, anything to do with——?"

"Probably not." Lort was on his feet. "Still, you might care to come along, sir—just in case."

"In case——?"

"In case it is the body of Sir Stephen Borlase that has just been found below Merlin Head."

"Accident?"

The Superintendent reached for his cap. "That's what we're going to find out."

.

The sky was almost cloudless, the air filled with a mild warmth, the sea sparkling within its far-flung semicircle of gleaming cliffs. On the front and in the broad, tree-lined streets, visitors—at this early season mainly recruited from the superior classes of society—made their way to and from the baths, the Winter Gardens, the circulating libraries, or exercised well-bred dogs with due regard to the cleanliness and decorum which is so marked a feature of the Sheercliff scene. As he drove the agitated Captain Meritt through this pleasing pageant, Superintendent Lort discernibly let his spirits rise. But the effect of this was only to give a more sardonic turn to his speech. An accident, he pointed out, whether in the sea or on the cliffs, was an undesirable thing. The City Council deprecated accidents. Accidents were dissuasive; potential visitors read about them and decided to go elsewhere. But a crime was another matter. Many pious and law-abiding Sheercliff citizens would ask for nothing better than a really sensational crime. The present season, it was true, was somewhat early. Even a murder extensively featured in the national Press would have little effect upon Metropole or Grand or Majestic folk. But the August crowds—the true annual bearers of prosperity to the town—were another matter. A course of events culminating in the Central Criminal Court in about the third week of July, Superintendent Lort opined, might take threepence off the rates.

Captain Meritt showed no appreciation of this unexpected vein of pleasantry in his professional colleague. He sat silent during the drive. He remained silent in the small police-station which they entered at the end of it. Here a melancholy sergeant led them out to a shed at the back for the purpose, as he expressed it, of viewing the remains. This, however, was for some minutes delayed. With a due sense of climax, the sergeant chose to pause in the intervening yard and favour his superior with a fuller account of the case.

An elderly clergyman, early abroad in the interest of bird-watching, had been the first to peer over Merlin Head and see the body. It lay sprawled on an isolated outcrop of rock at the base of the cliff, and only by an unlikely chance had it not fallen directly into the sea. Had this happened, it would probably have disappeared—at least as an identifiable individual—for good. For the currents played strange tricks on this coast, and it was only after some weeks that the sea commonly rendered up its dead. On this the sergeant was disposed to be expansive. “Nibbled, sir—that’s how they often are. Some quite small fish, it seems, are uncommonly gross feeders. But come along.”

On this macabre note, the three men entered the shed. The body lay on a long table, covered with a sheet. The sergeant stepped forward and drew this back, so that the face was revealed.

“It’s your man, all right.” Lort’s voice was decently subdued.

“It’s my man.” Meritt, very pale, glanced at the sergeant. “Any certainty how it happened?”

“The back of the head’s stove in. He might have been hit, and then thrown over the cliff. Or he might just have jumped and the damage been done by the rocks. The surgeon thinks they’ll be able to tell just which, once they’ve gone into the body more particular.”

“I see.” Meritt moved closer to the body, gave a startled exclamation, and drew the sheet down farther. “It’s Sir Stephen Borlase, all right. But those aren’t his clothes. At least, I never saw him in them.”

Lort frowned. “He wasn’t dressed like this when you followed him last night?”

“He wasn’t in anything like this dark stuff at all. He was in country kit—a light tweed with rather a bold pattern.”

"Odd." Lort turned to the sergeant. "Anything on those clothes—a tailor's label with the owner's name, for instance?"

"Nothing of the sort, sir. I'd say they were ordinary, good-class, off-the-peg garments. But there's something queer about the shoes."

"They don't fit?" Lort pounced on this.

"It's not that. It's *this*." The sergeant, his sense of drama re-asserting itself, whipped away the sheet altogether. "Did you ever see a corpse in one black shoe and one brown?"

.

"Suicide." Lort had driven halfway back through Sheercliff before he spoke. "Suicide planned so that it could never be proved. Borlase was simply going to disappear. When you followed him last night—or rather early this morning—he was spying out the land. Or it might be better to say the cliff and the sea."

"Look before you leap?" Meritt was moodily stuffing a pipe.

"Just that. And perhaps he didn't like what he saw. You told me that he walked up there briskly enough, but that his return to the Metropole was a bit irresolute. But he went through with the thing. Knowing that he had to give you the slip this time, he changed into those anonymous clothes in the dark—which is how he managed to land himself with different-coloured shoes."

"That may be true." Meritt was suddenly interested. "And the shoes were, in fact, to give him away! It might be one of those queer tricks of the mind—and particularly of a mind like Borlase's. Part of him didn't want anonymity and extinction. So he made this unconsciously motivated mistake and betrayal. An instance of what Freud calls the psychopathology of everyday life."

"No doubt." Superintendent Lort did not appear to feel that his picture of the case was much strengthened by this speculation. "Well, Borlase slipped out again later, and simply pitched himself over Merlin Head. He reckoned to go straight into the sea, and to be drawn out by the current. Later, we might or might not have got back an unrecognisable body in unidentifiable clothes. Of course, further investigation may prove me wrong. But I'd say it's a fair working supposition. Do you agree?"

Without interrupting the business of lighting his pipe, Captain Meritt shook his head. "I don't see it. Borlase was an odd chap, or I wouldn't have been given my job. He might, I suppose, feel driven to take his own life. And he might feel the act as disgraceful—as something to disguise. But why not disguise it as an accident? He had plenty of brains to work out something convincing in that way. Why should he try to make his death look like an unaccountable disappearance?"

"Might it be because he disliked you, sir?"

"What's that?" Meritt was startled.

"I mean, of course, disliked the way you'd been set on him. He resented having a gaoler disguised as a bodyguard—and quite right too, if you ask me." Lort delivered himself of this sentiment with vigour. "So he resolved to leave you in as awkward a situation as he could. Had he seemed just to clean vanish, you'd have been left looking decidedly a fool."

"I see." Meritt digested this view of the matter in silence for some seconds. And when at length he pronounced upon it, it was with unexpected urbanity. "Well, Borlase is dead, poor devil—and it's a bad mark to me either way. I'll be quite content myself if your interpretation is accepted by the coroner."

"But you doubt whether it will be?"

"I do." And Meritt puffed at his pipe with a sombre frown. "My guess is that there's more to come out, Superintendent. And probably with more bad marks attached. The country has lost Stephen Borlase. I have a nasty feeling it may have lost something else as well."

3

Derry Fisher felt rather like the Bellman. "What I tell you three times is true." It was just that number of times that he had now told his story: first to his uncle, then at the local police-station, and now—rather to his awe—to Sir John Appleby, high up in this quiet room in New Scotland Yard. Appleby himself, Derry saw, must be pretty high up. He was, in fact, an Assistant Commissioner. Derry was already guessing that the queer situation in which he found himself

involved was important as well as conventionally sensational. Appleby was not at all portentous. His idea of police investigation appeared to be friendly and at times mildly whimsical conversation. But Derry sensed that he was feeling pretty serious underneath.

"And you say you saw this girl into a taxi? But of course you did. Pretty or not, it was the natural and proper thing. And then you took the next taxi yourself?"

"No, sir." Derry shook his head, genuinely amused. "I found my natural level on top of a bus."

"Quite so. Taxi queues at these big stations are often longer than bus queues, anyway. I suppose there *was* a queue—streams of taxis going out?"

"Yes, sir. Parts of our train had been pretty crowded. I had to wait a moment while several more taxis shot past. One of them nearly bowled me over."

"Did you find yourself staring at people's shoes?"

Derry burst out laughing. "As a matter of fact, I did. I keep on doing it now."

"You do, indeed. You had a look at mine the instant you entered this room." And Appleby smiled genially at his embarrassed visitor. "You'd make a detective, Mr. Fisher, I don't doubt. And you tell your story very clearly."

"To tell you the truth, sir, I'm very relieved to find it credited. It seems so uncommonly queer."

"We get plenty of queer yarns in this place." Appleby companionably held out a box of cigarettes. "But of yours, as a matter of fact, we have a scrap of confirmation already."

Derry Fisher sat up eagerly. "You've heard from the girl?"

"Not yet—although we ought to to-day, if she ever looks at a newspaper or listens to the wireless. Unless, of course——" Appleby checked himself. "What we've had is news of an angry traveller at Waterloo, complaining of theft from his suit-case while he was absent from his compartment."

"Isn't that sort of thing fairly common?"

"Common enough. But this was on your train from Sheercliff this morning. And what was stolen was a pair of shoes—nothing

else. I've no doubt that you see the likely significance of that. By the time you had got to Waterloo, there was certainly nobody on your train in the embarrassing position of wearing a discernibly odd pair of shoes. Only the dead body in Sheercliff was still doing that. . . . By the way, have you any ideas about this?"

Derry, although startled, answered boldly. "Yes, sir. At least, I see one way that it might have come about. The two men—this Sir Stephen Borlase who is dead and the man who was on the train—for some reason changed clothes rather hastily in the dark. And they muddled the shoes."

Appleby nodded approvingly. "That's very good. Borlase, as a matter of fact, has been found in clothes which, it seems, can't be positively identified as his. Correspondingly, the clothes which your girl described as worn by the fellow on the train sound uncommonly like those being worn by Borlase when he was last seen alive. He may, of course, have been dead when the exchange took place. Indeed, that would seem to be the likely way of it. I wonder, now, what it would be like, changing clothes with a dead man—say with a murdered man—in the dark."

"I'm sure I'd muddle a good deal more than the shoes." Derry Fisher's conviction was unfeigned. "One would have to possess nerves of steel to do so ghastly a thing."

"Either that or be in an uncommonly tight corner. You'd be surprised at the things that timid or even craven folk will brace themselves to when really up against it." Appleby paused. "But aren't we supposing a darkness that can't really have been there? Unless, of course, we can place the thing in a cave or cellar or shuttered room."

"The moonlight!"

"Precisely. I asked about that during my last phone-call to Sheercliff half an hour ago. There can be no doubt that there was a full moon in an unclouded sky. I dare say you were aware of it yourself."

"Yes, sir. As a matter of fact, I was dancing in it."

"Then, there you are." Appleby appeared much pleased. "Are you fond of Rubens as a landscape painter?"

"Rubens?" Derry felt incapable of this abrupt transition to a polite cultural topic. "I'm afraid I don't know much about him."

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"He has one or two great things done in full moonlight. Everything marvellously clear, you know, but at the same time largely drained of colour." Appleby chuckled. "If you knocked me out by the light of the moon, Mr. Fisher, you could exchange clothes with me without the slightest difficulty. But you might very well go wrong over brown and black shoes. My guess is that they wouldn't be indistinguishable to a careful scrutiny, but that they would be the next thing to it. . . . And now I must really go across to Waterloo. I should be greatly obliged if you'd come along."

"While you inquire—investigate?"

"Just that. You might be a great help to us."

"I'll certainly come." Derry stood up—and suddenly a new view of this invitation came to him. "You don't mean to lose sight of me?"

"That is so." For the first time, Appleby spoke with real gravity. "You may as well know, Mr. Fisher, that this affair may be very serious indeed. Nobody connected with it will be lost sight of until it is cleared up."

"You make me wish I hadn't lost sight of the girl."

"I wish you had not. We must face the fact that she is the only person who could identify the man on the train—the living man in the odd shoes."

Slowly it dawned on Derry. "And I——?"

"You are the only person who could identify the girl, supposing—well, that she was no longer in a position to speak up for herself."

"You think she may be in danger?"

"I'd like to know who was in the next taxi or two after hers."

.

It chanced that the morning's train from Sheercliff had been neither broken up nor cleaned through, and a clerk led them to it over what, to Derry, seemed miles and miles of sidings. It stood, forlorn, dusty, and dead, in the rather bleak late-afternoon sunshine. Once aboard, Derry had less difficulty than he had expected in identifying the compartment in which his adventure had begun. It looked very impersonal and uninteresting now. He felt suddenly depressed, and

watched with growing scepticism the minutely careful search that Sir John Appleby made.

Whether after any success or not, Appleby eventually gave over. "This fellow who complained of losing shoes," he said. "Where was he?"

The clerk consulted some papers. "We have a note of that, sir. It was three carriages down, next to the restaurant-car. The passenger had gone to get himself an early lunch, leaving his suit-case on the seat of the empty compartment. When he got back, he found it open, with the contents tumbled about, and a pair of shoes missing. Of course he has no claim."

"Except on our interest." Appleby turned to Derry. "Now, I wonder why our elusive friend didn't substitute his own troublesome footwear and close the case? That *would* have given the other fellow a bit of a shock in time. But perhaps it was no occasion for a display of humour." Appleby spoke absently. His glance was still darting about the uncommunicative compartment, as if reluctant to give it best. Then he stepped into the corridor and moved up the train. "A group of airmen," he said, "mostly asleep. A solitary lady. A clergyman and his wife. Is that right?"

Derry nodded. "Quite right."

"And then the compartment where your girl made her awkward observation. If you don't mind, I'll go into this one alone." He did so, and moved about as if the whole place was made of eggshell. Derry watched fascinated. His scepticism was entirely gone. To his own eye the compartment looked blank and meaningless. Yet it suddenly seemed impossible that to so intent and concentrated scrutiny it should not at once yield some clamant and decisive fact.

"You can still smell what she called the Russian cigarettes." Appleby spoke over his shoulder. "And here in the ash-tray are two or three of the yellow stubs you saw yourself. I at once produce pill-boxes and forceps. Also a pocket lens." Derry glimpsed the railway clerk watching wide-eyed as Appleby actually performed these legendary operations. "I sniff. This tobacco—my dear Watson—is manufactured only in Omsk. Or is it Tomsk? At any rate, I distinctly

begin to see Red. Only Commissars are ever issued with this particular brand. The plot thickens. The vanished man has a slight cast in his left eye. A joint—one of the lower ones—is missing from his right forefinger. . . .” On this surprising rubbish Appleby’s voice died away. Regardless of the two men waiting in the corridor, he painfully explored the confined space around him for a further fifteen minutes. When he emerged, he was wholly serious. And Derry Fisher thought that he saw something like far-reaching speculation in his eye.

“Those young airmen, Mr. Fisher—you say they were asleep?”

“Not all of them.”

“And the clergyman and his wife?”

“Chatting and admiring the view.”

“On the far side?”

“No, the corridor side.”

“And the solitary lady?”

“She struck me as a headmistress, or something of that sort. She was working at papers.”

“Absorbed in them?”

“Well—not entirely. I think I remember her giving me rather a formidable glance as I went by. You think these people may have seen something important, sir?”

“They are a factor, undoubtedly.” Appleby was glancing at his watch. “I must get back. The mystery of the rifled suit-case is something that we needn’t pursue. What we want is your girl. And there ought to be word of her by now. What would be your guess about her when she saw all this in the papers? Is she the sort who might lose her head or panic and lie low?”

Derry shook his head. “I’m sure she’s not. She would see it was her duty to come forward, and she’d do so.”

“Kensington, you said—and you absolutely didn’t hear any more?” Appleby had dropped to the line, and they were now tramping through a wilderness of deserted rolling-stock. “And you gleaned absolutely nothing about her connections—profession, reason for having been in Sheercliff, and so on?”

“I’m afraid I didn’t.” Derry hesitated. “It wasn’t because I didn’t

want to. But she'd had this shock, and it would have seemed impertinent——"

"Quite so." Appleby was curtly approving. "But I wish we had just the beginning of a line on her, all the same."

Derry Fisher for some reason felt his heart sink. "You really do think, sir, that she may be in danger?"

"Certainly she is in danger. We must find her just as soon as we can."

.

Back in his room half an hour later, and with Derry still in tow, Appleby was making a trunk-call.

"Stephen Borlase?" The cultivated voice from Cambridge wasted no time. "Yes, certainly. I have no doubt that I count as one of his oldest friends. The news has saddened me very much. A wonderful brain, and on the verge of great things. . . . Mentally unbalanced? My dear sir, we all are—except conceivably at Scotland Yard. I know they were worried about Stephen, but if I were you I'd take it with a pinch of salt. He was not nearly so mad as Mark is, if you ask me."

"Mark?"

"Mark Borlase—Stephen's cousin. Haven't you contacted him?" The voice from Cambridge seemed surprised. "Mark is certainly next of kin. . . . Address? I know only that he lives in a windmill. From time to time I should imagine that he goes out and tilts at it. . . . Precisely—an eccentric. He goes in for unworldliness and absence of mind. . . . The same interests as Stephen? Dear me, no. Mark is literary—wrote a little book on Pushkin, and is a bit of an authority on Russian literature in general. An interesting but ineffective type."

"Thank you very much." Appleby was scribbling on a desk-pad. "Just one more thing. I wonder if you can tell me anything significant about Sir Stephen's methods of work?"

"Yes." The voice from Cambridge took on extra precision. "It happened in his head, and went straight into a small notebook which he kept in an inner pocket. That—and perhaps a few loose papers lying rather too carelessly about—was nowadays pretty well his whole stock-in-trade. I hope that notebook's safe."

"So do I. Sir Stephen had a bodyguard who ought to have kept

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an eye on all that. I expect to contact him at any time. You'd say that the notebook may be very important indeed?"

"My God!" And the telephone in Cambridge went down with a click.

As Appleby dropped his own receiver into place, a secretary entered the room. "A caller, sir—somebody I think you'll want to see about this Sheercliff affair."

Derry Fisher was conscious of sitting up with a jerk as Appleby swung round to ask crisply, "Not the girl?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. A cousin of the dead man. He gives his name as Mark Borlase."

"Bring him in." Appleby turned back to Derry. "Lives in a wind-mill, and pops up as if he were answering a cue. He may interest you, Mr. Fisher, even though he's not your girl. So stay where you are."

Derry did as he was told. Mark Borlase was a middle-aged, cultivated, untidy man. He had a charming smile and restless, tobacco-stained hands. His manner was decidedly vague, and one felt at once that his natural occupation was wool-gathering. Only good breeding and a sense of social duty, Derry guessed, kept him from relapsing into complete abstraction straightway.

"Sir John Appleby? My name is Borlase. They got hold of me from Sheercliff, and asked me to come along and see you here. This about Stephen is very sad. I liked him, and hope he liked me. We had nothing to say to each other, I'm afraid—nothing at all. But he was a good sort of person in his dry way. I'm very sorry that his end should be a matter of policemen and inquests and so forth. I wonder what I can do?" As he spoke, Mark Borlase produced a pair of glasses from a breast-pocket and clipped them on his nose. "Perhaps I could identify the body—something like that?" And Mark Borlase looked slowly round the room, as if confidently expecting a corpse in a corner. Not finding this, he let his glance rest mildly on Derry Fisher instead. "This your boy?"

"Your cousin's body is naturally at Sheercliff, Mr. Borlase. It has been adequately identified. And this gentleman is not my son"—Appleby smiled faintly—"but Mr. Derry Fisher, who happened to

travel up from Sheercliff this morning in circumstances which give him an interest in your cousin's death."

"From Sheercliff this morning? How do you do." And Mark Borlase gave Derry a smile which, for some reason, sent a prickling sensation down the young man's spine. "You were a friend of poor Stephen's?"

"No—nothing of that sort. I never knew him. It's just that on the train I ran across a—another passenger who'd had a queer experience—one that seems to connect up with Sir Stephen's death. That's why the police are interested in me."

"Indeed." Mark Borlase did not appear to find this ingenuous explanation sufficiently significant to hold his attention. He turned his mild gaze again to Appleby. "They say, you know, that there were times when Stephen wasn't quite himself."

"But you have no personal experience of that?"

"I didn't see him very often. Of course, we corresponded occasionally."

"About what?"

Mark Borlase seemed momentarily at a loss. "Well—don't you know—this and that."

"You said a moment ago that you and Sir Stephen had nothing at all to say to each other. Can you be a little more specific about the this and that which occupied your letters?"

"As a matter of fact"—and Mark Borlase hesitated—"Stephen got me to look at things for him from time to time."

"Things, Mr. Borlase?"

"Articles in Russian. It's my subject."

"I see." And Appleby nodded. "Articles, that would be, in learned and scientific journals? Sir Stephen's own stuff?"

"Dear me, no." Mark Borlase evinced a sort of absent-minded amusement. "I'm a literary person, and would be no good on anything technical. Stephen had his own experts to do all that sort of thing, as a matter of course."

"Philosophy, then—and sociology and so forth? He used you to acquaint himself with untranslated writings of—well, an ideological cast?"

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Mark Borlase's hand moved uneasily. "Is this what they call a security check? But it *was* matter of that sort. Stephen had an intermittent—but occasionally intense—interest in Communist theory and the like. I'm bound to confess that it irritated me very much. Not the doctrine—I don't give twopence for one political doctrine or another—but the style. I like my Russian good."

"You would have viewed with indifference your cousin's entering upon treasonable courses, but would have deprecated his continued concern with inelegant Russian prose?"

Rather surprisingly, Mark Borlase was on his feet and flushing darkly. "Damn it all, man, you understand the conversation of gentlemen better than that. I don't give a tinker's curse, I say, for one or another sort of hot air. But of course I wouldn't have a kinsman make a fool of himself and disgrace the family if I could help it. I used to translate or explain whatever rubbish Stephen in these occasional fits sent along—and do my best to laugh at him for his pains."

"And you were never seriously uneasy?"

Mark Borlase's hesitation was just perceptible. "Never. I realise there has been a certain amount of sinister talk. Stephen himself told me that some fool of a Cabinet Minister had decided he was a dangerously split personality, and that he had been plagued with a lot of nonsense as a result. For all I know of the present facts, such idiocy may have driven Stephen to suicide."

"I sincerely hope not." Appleby's tone was sober. "And I am sorry, Mr. Borlase, to have had to sound you on some rather unpleasant ground. It was good of you to come along so quickly. One of my assistants may want a little routine information at your convenience in a day or two. At the moment, I have only one further question. When did you see your cousin last?"

This time Mark Borlase answered promptly. "Six weeks ago. And he was perfectly well. I'm at the Junior Wessex, by the way, should you want me."

"Thank you very much."

For some moments after the door closed on Mark Borlase there was silence. Appleby sat quite still, lost in thought. Then he turned to Derry. "Well?"

"I've seen him before."

"*What!*"

"I've seen him before. It came to me when he smiled. I've seen him quite recently."

"Be careful, man." Appleby had sat up at his desk, square and severe. "This sort of thing is new to you—and sometimes it sets people fancying things. We don't want a false scent. So think."

Derry's mouth was dry and he guessed that he looked queer. For a full minute he, too, sat quite still. "*I know* I've seen him recently—and it connects with Sheercliff."

"Mark may be like Stephen in personal appearance. And you may have caught a glimpse of Stephen down there in the streets."

"No—I've seen *him*." Derry felt his heart pounding. "In a taxi . . . smiling . . . driving out of Waterloo to-day."

4

Sir John Appleby appeared quite unsurprised. "That is capital. It looks as if we are on the track of something at last. Let us suppose that you are not mistaken. The overwhelmingly probable inference is that Mark Borlase has himself been down to Sheercliff, and indeed travelled back by the same train as yourself."

"Then he lied, didn't he? He said he hadn't seen his cousin for six weeks."

"It certainly sounded like a lie. But he may have gone down intending to see Stephen, and then for some reason changed his mind. You didn't manage to see how he was dressed?"

Derry shook his head. "I'm afraid not. He *may* have been in those tweeds of Stephen's. All I saw was his face—leaning forward, and rather amused that I had to skip out of the way of his cab. But look here, sir"—Derry was suddenly urgent—"it was the cab immediately behind the girl's. *Could* he have followed it, and tracked her down? Can one really tell a taxi-driver to do that? It's always happening in stories."

Appleby smiled. "Certainly you can. Men occasionally want to follow girls without necessarily having it in mind to commit murder."

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You can imagine cases in which the motive might even be laudable. And most taxi-drivers wouldn't mind a bit of a chase. Try it, some time."

Derry, although accustomed by now to the intermittent levity of the Assistant Commissioner, was rather shocked. "But, sir, oughtn't we . . . I mean, if there's a chance he knows where to find her——"

"Quite so. One or two arrangements must certainly be made." Appleby was scribbling as he spoke, and now he touched a bell. "Here they are." He held up a sheet of paper and then handed it to his secretary. "See that this is acted on at once, Hunt, please. And are there any developments?"

"Captain Meritt just arrived, sir."

"Excellent. Show him in." Appleby turned to Derry. "The man who knows all about the Sheercliff end. It will be a bad business if we don't get somewhere now." He frowned. "And also, perhaps, if we do."

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Captain Meritt was military, brisk, and (Derry suspected) inwardly somewhat shattered. He listened to what Appleby had to say, nodded an introduction to the young man, and plunged straight into his own narrative.

"I waited in Sheercliff for the doctors to make up their minds. It seems there can be no doubt about what happened, and that the local man's notion of suicide is all wrong. Borlase was killed by a terrific blow on the head, and then within a few minutes was pitched over the cliff. I've tried to get medical help on the clothes. You know how scalp wounds, even when only superficial, bleed in a profuse and alarming way? I wondered if the clothes he was actually wearing when killed would by any chance remain wearable and presentable."

Appleby nodded. "A good point."

"But the leeches won't be positive one way or the other. It isn't certain there would have been any great mess. It's my bet now that the murderer stripped the dead man of his clothes and got him into the ones he was found in."

"I agree." Appleby was incisive. "But why? What was the situation?"

"I was the situation, if you ask me." And Meritt laughed, but without much effect of mirth. "As I see it now, the murder happened not on a second trip of Sir Stephen's to Merlin Head, but on the first and only trip. I saw Sir Stephen go up there. I thought I saw him come down. But all I really saw was his clothes. In fact, I came a first-class crash."

"It's certainly a possibility." Appleby spoke with a hint of professional commiseration. "And can you name the man who fooled you?"

"Krauss."

Appleby nodded. "I gather he may be involved. The Minister made a great point of it when he contacted me this morning."

"You see, Krauss——" Meritt hesitated. "Is Mr. Fisher here interested in Krauss?"

Appleby smiled. "I don't think it will much endanger the country, Mr. Fisher, to tell you about Krauss. He is a foreign agent whom we suspect of specialising in approaching scientists with the object of extracting secret information from them. Krauss's is the ideological and not the venal approach. We don't know that he has ever had much success. But it is believed that he keeps on trying. And Captain Meritt is perfectly correct in saying that Krauss is supposed to have been on the track of Sir Stephen Borlase. So Krauss is a likely suspect enough." Appleby turned his back to his colleague. "Fisher and I, as it happens, have another one. But carry on."

"Another suspect?" Meritt was startled.

"Not a bad one. But first come, first served. So continue."

Meritt laughed. "Very well. Here is the crime as I see it. Stephen Borlase was an unstable fellow, with fits in which he didn't very well know his own mind on certain vital matters. As a result, Krauss got a long way with him—got, in fact, as far as Merlin Head in the small hours of this morning. He persuaded Borlase to an appointment there—to a moonlight confabulation, you may say, in the little shelter by the cliff edge. The meeting, however, was a failure. Borlase was not disposed, after all, to see treason as a piece of higher duty.

Conceivably he never was. These, after all, are jumpy times. If they were not, some of us would be out of a job."

"Quite so."

"Krauss, then, was stuck. And, being stuck, he struck." Meritt paused, as if mildly surprised at his own command of the resources of English. "Primarily he was out to suborn Borlase. But there was this other possibility. Borlase carried on his person notes that were the vital growing-point of his researches. These would be enormously worth stealing—and particularly if the brain capable of producing them could simultaneously be destroyed for ever. That is why Krauss killed Borlase."

"If he did."

"I'm only putting a case." Meritt was patient. "Now, what would be the first thing one would do after committing murder and robbery? I think one would scout around. Krauss took a peer out from that cliff shelter—and just glimpsed me at the far end of the path leading to it. He would realise the situation in a flash, and see that it was pretty grim."

"Grim enough to take the fantastic risk of donning Borlase's clothes and hoping to evade you that way?"

"Yes. And it wasn't really so fantastic. He would know I was being as unobtrusive as possible, and that I would keep well back. So he chanced it."

"It's a first-class hypothesis." Appleby drummed absently on the desk before him. "But one point worries me. Borlase was found in *entirely* strange clothes? And why a *complete* exchange? And why bother to re-dress the corpse at all?"

"Krauss suddenly tumbled to the significance of the cliff, the sea, and the currents. With luck, he could get rid of the body for days or weeks. That would be valuable in itself. Moreover, if it was then recovered entirely unidentifiable, either in its own person or by any of its clothes, the eminent Sir Stephen Borlase would simply have disappeared without explanation. There was a neat little propaganda trick to take in that."

"Very well. Krauss—or another—effects this change of clothes, and then pitches the body into the sea. Or rather, *not* into the sea."

It lands on a small outcrop of rock. And so the murderer's plan—as you see it, that is—partly fails. Now, there is a point that occurs to me there. Suppose that the murderer, for some reason, was—so to speak—*aiming* not at the sea but at that rock? Would it have been a practical target? Could he have reckoned on keeping the body *from* the sea?"

Meritt frowned. "I'm not clear about the bearing of your question."

"Conceivably it has none. But one ought, I think, to consider the question *Accident or design?* on every occasion that one possibly can."

"I entirely agree." Meritt thought for a moment. "Yes, I think the rock would prove, if one experimented, a reasonably easy target."

"Well, then—let's go on. The disguised Krauss, with Borlase's notebook happily in his pocket, does succeed in getting past you."

"I'm afraid so. But he is by no means out of the wood. There I am, discreetly behind him. If he wants to avoid suspicion, there is only one natural thing for him to do at the end of this nocturnal stroll. He must return to Borlase's hotel. He must accept the risk of being confronted, face on, by a night porter. Moreover, he probably has no more than Borlase's key as a clue to what room he must make for. And he must find it before I, in my turn, regain the Metropole."

"In fact, it was all pretty sticky—all the time and without knowing it—he had made that ghastly slip-up over the shoes, and was now wearing one of Borlase's and one of his own."

"Exactly. But he did get to Borlase's suite quite safely. Later he crept out again, and took the first train to Town. He can't, I think, have had any base in Sheercliff, or he would have made for it first and got into other clothes."

Derry Fisher had listened fascinated to this hypothetical reconstruction of events in which he himself had been obscurely involved. Now he broke in. "This man Krauss, sir—have you ever seen him?"

Meritt nodded. "Certainly. I was given an unobtrusive view of a good many of his kidney when I took on my present job."

"Could he be described as middle-aged and intellectual-looking; and does he smoke Russian cigarettes?"

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"I don't know about his smoking, although there are people who will. But the description certainly fits."

"It certainly fits." Appleby nodded thoughtfully. "But then—it would fit Mark Borlase as well."

"*Mark Borlase?*" Meritt was puzzled.

"Stephen's cousin. They don't seem to have briefed you in the family, Meritt, quite as they should. Mark Borlase appears to have travelled up from Sheercliff to-day, although he has kept quiet about it. Fisher here saw him at Waterloo—and believes that he may even have followed the taxi of the girl who spotted the shoes. When I hear of anybody claiming actually to have seen your friend Krauss there, I shall begin to take rather more interest in him. Meanwhile, I keep my eye on Cousin Mark. You don't happen to be a member of the Junior Wessex? A pity. He told us he's putting up there for the night. You could have gone and taken a peep at him for yourself."

"I'm going to do my best to take a peep at Krauss." Captain Meritt rose. "I haven't much hope for that notebook—but one never knows. These fellows have queer ways. He may hold on to it till he gets his price."

"There's some comfort in that. Or Mark Borlase may."

Meritt moved to the door. "I think your Mark Borlase is a rank outsider."

"Fisher and I have our money on him, all the same."

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When Meritt had departed, Appleby looked at his watch. "I wonder," he asked, "if you would care for a cup of tea? We make astonishing tea at the Yard. And capital anchovy toast."

"Thank you very much." Derry Fisher was disconcerted. "But oughtn't we——?"

Appleby smiled. "To be organising the siege of the Junior Wessex—or otherwise pushing effectively about? Well, I think we have the inside of an hour to relax in."

Derry stared. "Before—before something *happens?*"

"Before—my dear young man—we take a long shot at finally clearing up this odd business of a dead man's shoes."

"A black shoe and a brown—how very curious!"

"What did you say?" Jane Grove set down her tea-cup with a surprising clatter.

"And—dear me!—at Sheercliff." Jane's aunt, enjoyably interested, reached for a slice of cake. "You might have run into it. Which just shows, does it not? I mean, that in the midst of life we are in death. I've got a whole cherry."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Jane's voice trembled slightly.

"Something in the paper, dear." Jane's aunt propped the folded page against the milk-jug. "A poor man found dead beneath the cliffs quite early this morning."

"Early this morning!"

"And something about *another* man. Will you have a third cup?"

"No. Go on."

"I intend to, dear. I *always* take three cups."

"I mean about the other man."

"The other man? Oh, yes. He seems to have travelled on a train, and to have worn mixed-up shoes too. There are people at Scotland Yard who want any information about him."

"May I see?" Jane took the evening paper and read without speaking.

"It couldn't be a new fashion?"

"A new fashion, aunt?"

"Wearing different-coloured shoes. *Two* men, you see. But one—of course—now dead."

Jane laughed a little wildly. "No—not a new fashion." She got abruptly to her feet. "I think I must——"

"Yes, dear?"

Jane hesitated. "I must water the pot. You might like a *fourth* cup." She performed this commonplace action with a steady hand, and when she spoke again her tone was entirely casual. "I'm afraid I have to go out."

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"To go out again, Jane—after your long day?"

"I—I've got to do something I forgot. It's rather important." Jane fetched her handbag and gloves. "I don't suppose I shall be very long."

"Very well, dear. But don't forget—you can't be too careful."

Jane Grove jumped. "Careful?"

"Of the traffic, dear. So dangerous nowadays."

Jane, standing by the window, smiled wryly. The quiet Kensington road was deserted. She lingered for some minutes. Then, as if reproaching herself for some lack of resolution, she grabbed her bag and hurried out.

Sir John Appleby's tea and anchovy toast, although it had all the appearance of being a leisurely and carefree affair, had a steady accompaniment of messages despatched and received. Finally, Appleby's secretary came in and spoke with a trace of excitement.

"Fifteen Babcock Gardens, sir. And at five-forty-five."

"Good." Appleby rose briskly. "He did as he was told, and said he'd walk?"

"Yes. He's making for the Green Park now."

"That gives us all very good time. You've got three cars out?"

"They should be pretty well posted by now. We've studied the maps and had a report from the section."

Appleby nodded and signed to Derry Fisher to follow him. "And what sort of a problem does this house in Babcock Gardens look like presenting?"

"Tricky, sir—but it might be worse. At a corner, but very quiet. All the houses there have basements with areas. There's a deserted cabman's shelter over the way." The secretary hesitated. "Are you taking a bit of a risk, sir?"

"That's as it will appear." Appleby's tone suggested that he found this question not wholly in order. "And now we'll be off."

"Your car's outside, sir—with the short-wave tested and correct."

Below, a discreetly powerful limousine was waiting, and into this Derry Fisher found himself bundled. It had a table with street-plans, and it was filled with low-pitched precise speech. Appleby had no

sooner sat down than he joined in. The effect, as of an invisible conference, was very queer and very exciting. Derry had been involved in this sort of thing before—but only in the cinema. He rather expected the car to go hurtling through London with screaming sirens. The pace, however, proved to be nothing out of the ordinary. Turning into the Mall, they moved as sedately as if in a procession. Carlton House Terrace seemed to go on for ever, and the Royal Standard fluttering above Buckingham Palace drew only very slowly nearer. When they rounded Queen Victoria on her elaborate pedestal and swung round for Constitution Hill, it was at a speed that seemed more appropriate to sightseers than to emissaries of the law.

But if the car dawdled, Derry's mind moved fast—much faster than it was accustomed to do in the interest of his uncle's business. He had never heard of Babcock Gardens, but he guessed that it was an address in Kensington—and the address, too, which he had failed to hear the girl giving at Waterloo that morning. And somebody was walking to it—walking to it through the Green Park. And Appleby had acknowledged that the girl was in danger, and Appleby's secretary had let slip misgivings over the riskiness of what was now going on. What *was* now going on? Quite clearly, the setting of a trap. *Appleby was setting a trap, with the girl as bait.*

"I ought to tell you that there may be a little shooting before we're through with this."

Derry jumped. Appleby, apparently unconscious of any strain, had murmured the words in his ear. "Shooting, sir—you mean at the girl?"

"But all this is itself a very long shot." Appleby had ominously ignored the question. "It mayn't come off at all. But it's going to be uncommonly labour-saving if it does. . . . I think we turn out of Knightsbridge at the next corner."

Derry was silent. He felt helpless and afraid. The crawl continued. Appleby was again absorbed in listening to reports and giving orders. But he had time for one brief aside. "Complicated, you know. Lurking for lurkers. Requires the policeman's most cat-like tread. Not like marching up and arresting a fellow in the name of the law."

Again Derry said nothing; he didn't feel at all like mild fun.

Suddenly the pace increased. Appleby's dispositions—whatever they were—appeared to be completed. The car ran through broad, quiet streets between rows of solidly prosperous-looking houses. Presently it turned left into a narrower road, and then left again into what seemed a deserted mews. And there it drew to a halt.

Appleby jumped out. "The unobtrusive approach to our grandstand seat."

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Derry followed. "A grandstand seat?"

"We are at the back of Babcock Gardens. A surprised but obliging citizen is giving us the run of his dining-room. Number fifteen is just opposite."

It seemed to Derry Fisher afterwards that what followed was all over in a flash. The dining-room of the obliging citizen was sombre and Victorian, and this gave the sunlit street outside, viewed through a large bay-window, something of the appearance of a theatrical scene—an empty stage awaiting the entrance of actors and the beginning of an action.

Suddenly it was peopled—and the action had taken place. The house opposite stood at a corner. Round this came the figure of a man, glancing upwards, as if in search of a street number. Derry had time only to realise that he was familiar when the door of number fifteen opened and a girl came down the steps. It was the girl of Derry's encounter on the train that morning. She had almost reached the footpath when she staggered and fell—and in the same instant there came the crack of a revolver shot. The man was standing still, apparently staring at her intently. Derry could see only his back. But he now knew that it was the back of Mark Borlase.

Borlase took a step forward. Simultaneously, another figure leapt across the road—it must have been from the corresponding corner—and made a dash for Borlase. It was Meritt. What he intended seemed to be a flying Rugby tackle. But before he could bring this off, yet another figure dramatically appeared. A uniformed policeman, hurling himself up the area-steps of number fifteen, took the charging Meritt in the flank and brought him crashing to the ground. In an instant there were policemen all over the place.

"Come along." Appleby touched the horrified Derry Fisher on the arm. They hurried out. Mark Borlase had not moved. Shocked and bewildered, he was looking from one side to the other. On his left, Meritt had been hauled to his feet, and stood collared by two powerful constables. On his right, still sprawled on the steps of number fifteen, lay the girl—a pool of blood forming beneath one arm.

Derry ran towards her, his heart pounding. As he did so, she raised herself, and with a groping movement found her handbag. For a moment, and with a queerly expressionless face, she gazed at Meritt and at the men who held him. Then with her uninjured arm she opened her bag, drew out a small glittering object, and thrust it in her mouth.

"Stop her!"

Appleby's cry was too late. Another revolver shot broke the quiet of Babcock Gardens. Incredibly—incredibly and horribly—Derry Fisher's beautiful girl had blown her brains out.

6

Later that evening Appleby explained.

"There was never much doubt, Mr. Borlase, that your cousin had been murdered. And clearly the crime was not one of passion or impulse. The background of the case was international espionage. Sir Stephen was killed in order to obtain an important scientific secret and to eliminate the only brain capable of reproducing it. There may have been an attempt—conceivably by the man Krauss—to get at Sir Stephen by the ideological route. But that had certainly come to nothing. You agree?"

Mark Borlase nodded. "Stephen—as I insisted to you—was really perfectly sound. He worried me at times, it is true—and it was only yesterday that I felt I ought to go down and have a word with him. Actually, we didn't meet. I got him on the telephone, and knew at once that there was no question of any trouble at the moment. So I concealed the fact that I was actually in Sheercliff, put up at the Grand for the night, and came back this morning. I ought to have been franker when you challenged me, no doubt."

"It has all come straight in the wash, Mr. Borlase. And now let me go on. Here was a professional crime. This made me at once suspicious of the genuineness of any *muddle* over those shoes. *But they might be a trick designed to mislead.* And, if that was so, I was up against a mind given to doing things *ingeniously*. I made a note that it might be possible to exploit that later.

"Now the train. I came away from my inspection of it convinced that the girl's story was a fabrication from start to finish. The fact stared me in the face."

Derry Fisher sat up straight. "But how *could* it? I've chewed over it again and again——"

"My dear young man, these things are not your profession. This girl, representing herself as badly frightened, ignored three compartments—in two of which she would have found feminine support and comfort—and chose to burst in upon a solitary and suitably impressionable young man of her own age. Again, while the mysterious man with the different-coloured shoes would certainly have retreated *up* the train, the rifled suit-case was *down* the train—the direction in which the girl herself went off unaccompanied, for her cup of coffee. Again, the Russian cigarettes had discernibly *been* smoked in a holder. On one of them, nevertheless, there was a tiny smear of lipstick." Appleby turned to Derry. "I think I mentioned it to you at the time."

"Mentioned it?" Derry was bewildered—and then light came to him. "When you made that silly—that joke about seeing red?"

"I'm afraid so. Well now, the case was beginning to come clear. Sir Stephen's body had been dropped on that rock, and not into the sea, deliberately; we were meant to find it in the strange clothes and the unaccountable shoes—otherwise the whole elaborate false trail laid by the girl on her railway journey would be meaningless. But *why* this elaboration? There seemed only one answer. To serve as an alibi, conclusive from the start, for somebody anxious to avoid any intensive investigation. My thoughts turned to Meritt as soon as he produced that streamlined picture of the man Krauss as the criminal."

Mark Borlase nodded. "And so you set a trap for him?"

"Precisely. But first, let me give you briefly what my guess about Meritt was. He had been offered money—big and tempting money—to do *both* things: get the notebook and liquidate Sir Stephen. He saw his chance in Sir Stephen's habit of taking that nocturnal stroll. Last night he simply followed him up to the Head, killed and robbed him, and dressed the body in clothes he had already concealed for the purpose, including the odd shoes. Then he dropped the body over the cliff so that it would fall just where it did, returned to the Metropole, and telephoned his confederate to begin playing her part on the eight-five this morning. The girl—her name was Jane Grove—was devoted to him. And she played up very well—to the end, I'd say."

For a moment there was silence in Appleby's room. Then Derry asked a question. "And your trap?"

"It depended on what is pretty well an axiom in detective investigation. A criminal who has—successfully, as he thinks—brought off an ingenious trick will try to bring off another, twice as ingenious, if you give him a chance. Still guessing—for I really had no evidence against Meritt at all—I gave him such a chance just as irresistibly as I could.

"The girl, you see, must come forward, and repeat the yarn she had told on the train. That was essential to the convincingness of the whole story. It was, of course, a yarn about encountering a man who doesn't exist. For this *nobody* I determined to persuade Meritt to substitute a *somebody*: yourself, Mr. Borlase. You had been on that train and had concealed the fact. I let Meritt have this information. I gave him the impression that I strongly suspected you. I let slip the information that you could be contacted at your club, the Junior Wessex. And as soon as Meritt had left I got a message to you there myself, explaining what I wanted and asking you to co-operate. You did so, most admirably, and I am very grateful to you."

Mark Borlase inclined his head. "A blood-hunt isn't much in my line, I'm bound to say. But it seemed proper that Stephen's murderer should be brought to book."

Derry Fisher looked perplexed. "I don't see how Meritt——"

"It was simple enough." Appleby broke off to take a telephone

call, and then resumed his explanation. "Meritt represented himself to Mr. Borlase on the telephone as my secretary, and asked him to come to my private address—which he gave as fifteen Babcock Gardens—at five-forty-five. He then got in touch with the girl and arranged *his* trap." Appleby smiled grimly. "He didn't know it was *our* trap too."

"He was going to incriminate Mr. Borlase?"

"Just that. Remember, you would have been able to swear that you saw Mr. Borlase leaving Waterloo in a taxi just behind the girl. From this would follow the inference that Mr. Borlase had tracked her to her home; and that after his interview here he had decided that he must silence her."

"But Meritt didn't himself mean to—to kill the girl?"

"He meant to stage an attempted murder by Mr. Borlase; and to that he must have nerved her on the telephone. It all had to be very nicely timed."

Mark Borlase suddenly shivered. "He was going to arrest me, after he had himself winged the girl? He would have said the revolver was mine—that sort of thing?"

"Yes. He may even have meant to kill you, and maintain that it had happened in the course of a struggle. Then the girl would have identified you as the man with the odd shoes. And that would have been that."

"How would he have explained being on the scene—there in Babcock Gardens, I mean—at all?"

"By declaring that I had prompted him to go and have a look at you at your club; that he had spotted you coming out and had decided to shadow you. It would have been some such story as that. He had lost his head a bit, I'd say, in pursuit of this final ingenuity. It was criminal artistry, of a sort. But it was thoroughly crazy as well."

"And Stephen's notebook?"

"That telephone-call was to say it has been found with Meritt's things. Meritt thought himself absolutely safe, and he was determined to hold out for a good price." Appleby rose. "Well—that's the whole thing. And we shall none of us be sorry to go to bed."

As they said good-bye, Derry Fisher hesitated. "May I ask one more question?"

"Certainly."

"The shooting in Babcock Gardens was an afterthought of Meritt's—and I think it was the afterthought of a fiend. But why—after you had examined the train and guessed nearly the whole truth—did you tell me that the girl was in danger?"

"She was in danger of the gallows, Mr. Fisher. But at least she has escaped *that*."

The Burnt Tout

H. C. BAILEY

The day after he pronounced sentence of death in the burnt tout case Sir Maule Trask came upon Mr. Fortune eating a muffin in a club. Trask has earned awe as the hardest sceptic of evidence on the bench, the bane of expert witnesses and policemen. But he stopped by Reggie Fortune's chair and his frog-like eyes blinked and twinkled. "That should have given you satisfaction, Fortune," he croaked.

Mr. Fortune looked up at him over an evening paper. "Satisfied you? Great is truth, what?"

"In the right hands. I do not recall a case more difficult for the police. The facts were perverted by a brain of singular subtlety. I have never had evidence of a police investigation so sagaciously directed."

"Quite good, wasn't it?" Mr. Fortune sighed. "Not by me, though."

"You will permit me to give the credit to a controlling intelligence not always present."

"Thanks very much," said Mr. Fortune drearily.

"A sad story," the judge nodded. "I have not been unaffected myself."

Mr. Fortune watched him out of sight and read the paper again. Like all the others that day, it printed a leader to acclaim the triumph of justice in the burnt tout case, and assured the public that they could now depend on the police, armed with the unerring skill of modern science, to catch every murderer and right every wrong.

"Grrrh!" said Mr. Fortune, and went to sleep wondering if old Trask meant anything—didn't matter what he meant—couldn't do anything. . . .

Mr. Fortune was introduced to the case on an October dawn in a by-way of the suburbs.

The night before, a railwayman coming home from the Barnham coal sidings saw flames break out of a window. Among miles of neat criss-cross streets, the mess of the railway yards, the concert of their shunting and of the perpetual lorries on one of the busiest trunk roads, have preserved from rebuilding some of the narrow lanes, some of the ramshackle cottages which served Barnham when it was a scattered village outside London.

Cherrywood Lane has a dust cart depot now where the wood was. The blank wall of that confronts some half dozen cottages, each in a patch of garden. It was one of these which the railwayman found on fire. He ran to it shouting, and hammered at the door, but no answer came. To break in was impossible. The whole of the ground floor was ablaze.

He said afterwards that the neighbours were a ruddy long time turning out to the row he made. But the clatter of the coal yards and the roar of the high road have produced a lack of attention to noise among those who sleep in Cherrywood Lane. Some of them did appear at last and went off to ring the fire alarm. Even then no policeman had arrived.

The fire brigade were not quick. They came promptly the nearest way, up Carter's Lane, which is at the back of the Cherrywood Lane cottage gardens. But there the fire escape ran over a man and had to stop, holding up the engine. When they got him from under the wheels they found that he was dead and a policeman. By the time they put the fire out the cottage consisted of four windowless walls and a roof surrounding charred and stinking chaos.

In the misty chill of dawn Mr. Fortune, muffled to the eyes, emerged from his house and got into a police car. It went off like a shell from a gun and flung him upon the bosom of Inspector Underwood. "My only aunt!" he gasped. "What's happened to the police? How did you come to know cars could move?"

The Burnt Tout

"Sorry, sir." Underwood arranged him tenderly in the corner. "Very sorry to drag you out at this nasty time. But there's no doubt it's a case for you. And you always like us to get you in at the start."

"Me?" All that could be seen of Mr. Fortune's face, a pink nose and two sunken eyes, exhibited disgust. "I never like bein' got in to any case. Even at a civilised hour. Why this unnatural zeal? What makes the police throw fits in the dead o' night over the fire brigade findin' a corpse in a burnt out house? Who is the illustrious defunct?"

"We don't know," said Underwood. "Thought to be the resident."

"To-day's great thought. Where does it hurt you?"

"If so, name of Smith, Joseph Smith. Nothing else known about him."

Mr. Fortune made a sorrowful noise and closed his eyes. "Oh, what a futile web they weave, policemen trying to deceive," he murmured.

"It's the truth, Mr. Fortune," said Underwood earnestly. "We haven't any line on Smith at all. But there was a constable killed too."

"Oh!" Mr. Fortune's eyes opened again. "That's what stung the force. Very proper. You appeal to my better nature. Granted. I have a heart when awake. Yes, I also am a policeman. Up to me. Poor beggar. How was he killed? In Smith's fire?"

"No, sir. Run over by the fire escape."

"My dear chap!" Mr. Fortune sat up. "What are you giving me?"

"I'm asking you, sir. This constable had a beat which covered the lane Smith lived in. The alarm of fire was given about midnight, by the neighbours, not by the constable; nothing seen or heard of him. But the escape and the engines coming up the road at the back of Smith's house ran over him there. Being there, he must have seen the fire, he ought to have got on to it, blown his whistle, knocked up Smith, called the brigade. Why didn't he? Why did he just hang about and get under the escape?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," Mr. Fortune murmured. "The mind is impotent. Dead when picked up?"

"Absolutely. Smashed."

"Well, well. Man of good reputation?"

"One of the best."

"Poor beggar. You never know, do you? In our trade."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Fortune." Underwood stiffened.

"Oh, my dear chap. Possibilities unlimited. We may limit 'em when we do some work on him. Friend of our Mr. Smith, by any chance?"

"It's not likely," said Underwood.

"You think not? No. Certain lack of interest in Mr. Smith does appear. I wonder."

"Are you suggesting——" Underwood exploded and was stopped.

"Not me, no. You said he didn't do his duty."

"I just gave you the facts," Underwood muttered, and sank into glum silence.

The car swung round from the noisy high road into the narrows of Cherrywood Lane, drew up at the burnt cottage. Mr. Fortune alighted in slow time, contemplating it, then stood still and surveyed its shabby neighbours. "Not all modern conveniences, what?" he murmured. "Not everybody's money. Shy old places. Out of the way yet in the way. Well, well."

Underwood hustled on to meet a begrimed officer of the fire brigade. "Anything more?"

"Nix. Come and have a look at him. That'll do for you."

"All right. Here's Mr. Fortune."

"Good luck to him. I wouldn't have his job. I've had enough with mine." The smutty face grinned sardonically at Reggie. "Come right in, sir."

"Thanks." Reggie gazed about the trampled sodden garden. "What a mess! However. Wasn't tidy before you came. Not much of a gardener, our Mr. Smith." He ambled on, but not into the cottage; he went round it and on down the larger section of garden behind. That also was an unkempt waste of which the hoses had made a quagmire. But Reggie picked his way over it till he reached the fence at the end.

"What's the idea?" the fire brigade officer asked Underwood.

"Don't ask me." Underwood scowled at Reggie's operations.

He looked over the fence, he moved along, he stopped, he studied

it closely. "I say, Underwood," he called, and Underwood squelched to his side. "If a man got over here he would be in the lane where your constable was, what?"

"The lane's at the back here, I told you."

"Yes. Look at that," Reggie pointed.

The fence was of palings, nailed together overlapping, dark and half rotten. From a cross beam, slivers of the decayed wood had been scraped away. Two of the palings were broken at the top to jagged edges.

"Somebody did get over there," Reggie murmured.

"Might be," Underwood said sullenly. "Might have been any time."

"Oh no. No. You won't look. Something on the palings. See? Bit of flesh and skin with hairs. Not long detached from owner. From back of human hand or arm. Hair's black. What is the complexion of your deceased constable?"

"I couldn't tell you," Underwood growled.

"Don't know much, do you? However. Knowledge is now coming in. Somebody left the premises of our Mr. Smith by stealth last night. Palings broke as he climbed, and he tore himself before he dropped into your constable's lane."

"We don't know that," Underwood objected. "It might have been someone getting in——"

"While watched by the kind constable below. You think that?"

"Might have been a fireman, I mean. Or might have been Smith himself doing something with the fence."

"My dear chap! Full of objections, aren't you?" Reggie smiled. "The perfect collaborator." He cut off the evidence from the palings, put it away and returned to the fire brigade officer. "Did any of your men get over the fence down there?"

"No, sir. We worked from the front."

"Underwood just wanted to know," Reggie purred. "And was our friend Smith dark or fair?"

"My God! Ask me another. You have a look at what he is."

"I will. Yes. What was the cause of the fire?"

"No telling. When we got here the whole inside was a furnace. Gas blazing like hell. Pipes melted, you know, compo pipes, like most of these old places have, and all the woodwork well alight. Might have started from the chimney getting too hot, all the wood's rotten, it'd catch like tinder. We can't ever know for sure. Nothing left to work on."

"Only two corpses or so," Reggie murmured.

"Two? Oh, you mean the policeman. Yes, I can't make out what he was up to. Our chaps swear they didn't see him till the escape was on top of him. He was sort of on hands and knees in the road like looking for something."

"You think so? Same like us, Underwood. We're grovelling looking for what not. Proper policeman's position. However. On with the dance. Introduce me to our Mr. Smith."

"With pleasure," the fire brigade man said grimly, and strode into the cottage. "There you are." He turned away.

The air was pungently foul. From the broken windows grey light broke through vapour upon wet mounds of black, broken wood and plaster. In a cleared space there lay upon its back what had been a man. Much of its clothes was burnt away from the darkened flesh. The head was bald. Its face had sunk and shrivelled.

Reggie knelt down in the ashes beside it. His gloved hands passed from the head to lay more of the body bare, came back to the face and dwelt upon it, moving it. The fire brigade officer went out. . . .

"Well, well." Reggie stood up and drew off his gloves. "Our Mr. Smith was a blonde, Underwood." Underwood gulped. "Sorry to annoy you. But somebody else did use his premises last night. Nothing more from him at present. Have him taken to the mortuary. Quick as you can. The sooner it's over the sooner to sleep."

Underwood strode out, but Reggie remained, loitering about the debris, gazing up to the roof. Above the broken joists of the upper story the dank, sooty walls had two or three patches comparatively clean.

He moved to the door and beckoned the fire brigade officer. "Where would you say the fire began?" he asked.

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"I told you, I can't place it. Only the gas got going somewhere."

"Rather low, what? And where was our Mr. Smith then?"

"Not so easy neither. We found him on the ground floor with the stuff from above on top of him. But you can't trust that."

"You think not? He hadn't gone to bed. Still got his clothes on."

"That's right. In his slippers though."

"Yes. His day's work was done. Wonder what it was. Notice anything about his possessions?"

The answer was a stare and a snort. "Have you?"

Reggie led him in and pointed to the clean patches on the upper wall. "Where pictures hung."

"Looks like it. What then?"

"I should like to know what the pictures were," said Reggie plaintively.

"You——" The fire brigade man felt words inadequate. He pointed at the mounds of ash and broken wood and plaster. "Find pictures in that!"

"Job of work. Yes. Go through it with a fine tooth comb. Bits of picture. Bits of anything that tells a story. Especially a bit of brass or copper. Good-bye."

He went out, and the fire brigade said things.

He walked round into the lane behind Mr. Smith's cottage. That is rather wider than Cherrywood Lane, but still less frequented. On one side are the back fences of the Cherrywood cottages, on the other the railings of a cemetery. Path and roadway had been washed down by the muddy water which still oozed from Mr. Smith's garden, but a little above its broken palings Reggie found by the gutter some clots of blood. He frowned over them, he collected them and wandered about and about, his round face reproachful and bewildered, glancing continually from the place of bloodshed to the break in the palings. It was some way below that he stooped and picked out of a dam of dirt in the gutter a bit of crushed brass.

"Oh my hat!" he groaned at it and wandered back to the cottage and petulantly demanded of the driver of Underwood's car if Inspector Underwood was lost.

"Here I am, sir," Underwood called from a conference with the fire brigade.

"Come on. The mortuary."

"All right," Underwood grumbled, and joined him. "Smith's body hasn't been moved yet."

"No. Not swift, are you? But your constable's has. Begin with him. Get on."

They drove away and Underwood complained bitterly. "I don't know what you have in your mind, Mr. Fortune." Reggie lay back and closed his eyes. "I suppose you think the place was set on fire. But what is the use of making the firemen look for pictures?"

"My dear chap. Oh, my dear chap! Fundamental question, why was our Mr. Smith burnt? For what he'd done or been or got. Which might emerge from his possessions. Lots of pictures tell a story. And pictures bein' behind glass stand a lot of heat."

"Suppose they do find bits of his family portraits?" Underwood was contemptuous. "What then?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," Reggie murmured. "Your defunct constable might have."

"You're making a dead set against him!"

"Oh no. No. Inferrin' he knew more about what happened to Mr. Smith than we do."

"I see no reason to suspect him." Underwood was truculent and resentful.

"Oh my Underwood! Only what you said. He didn't give the alarm. He didn't do his duty. However. He may have had reason. Things are not what they seem. But he may have been run over as stated, more or less, though it wasn't likely. Somebody did shed blood in the gutter."

"Of course he was run over," Underwood exclaimed.

"Yes. Somehow. But why was he crawling in the gutter? Interestin' questions. Crucial questions."

"You said yourself, he was looking for something."

"Said it could be. Yes. Do you think he was looking for this? Which also was in the gutter." Reggie held out the bit of crushed brass.

Underwood turned it over and over. "So crushed up," he muttered. "Might be a cartridge case. Is that what you make it?"

"Oh yes. Case of a revolver cartridge. But sadly smashed. By that confounded fire escape."

"And you say the constable was trying to find it? What's that mean? It's saying he shot somebody—Smith, eh?—and was getting rid of the evidence. Where's the revolver then?"

Reggie gazed at him with a satiric smile. "My Underwood! You're saying, not me. Takin' what you say—there are draintraps in that lane. But I should say you haven't thought it out. Other questions arise. Most urgent question, was the constable dark, was the constable the fellow who left a bit of himself on Mr. Smith's fence?"

They went into the mortuary. Reggie drew back the sheet which covered the constable's body and Underwood choked an exclamation of distress. The features, the very form of the man's head, were lost in crushing wounds. "Yes, his hair is black," Reggie murmured. "And his hands——" He stopped, he moved to inspect them. Underwood watched, dismally impatient, till Reggie turned upon his fidgets a face of cold curiosity and a bitter question: "Well?"

"I can see. His hands are torn," Underwood exploded.

"Yes, that is so."

"You'll say it was him got over Smith's fence."

"No, I shan't." Reggie was shrill. "The one thing I shan't say. Hands aren't torn right. Not enough gone. Don't know any more. Don't know anything now. Find something yourself. Which don't lead to nowhere. Which hasn't been mucked up. Find somebody who can tell you what this fellow was to t'other fellow. Run away."

It has been complained that Mr. Fortune lost his temper over this case, a condition rare in him. He admits the charge with pleasure and pride. No case, he maintains, was ever so confused by perversion of evidence through the tricks of chance and the ingenuity of killers. Resentment at these operations he declares essential to sanity. He is still resentful, though passion is spent. The case is his pet example of the infernal humour of chance. But he remains dubious what he would have made of it if chance had stood out and left him to deal with the murders unadulterated.

Late on that afternoon he came languidly into the room of the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department and rang the bell and dropped into the easiest chair. "A pot of your tea," he moaned. "With water. And buttered toast. With some butter on."

"We're out of butter, Reginald," Lomas said severely, "but there's plenty of hot water for you. You've given Underwood a monumental hump. And the fire brigade want your blood."

"Well, well." Reggie wriggled himself comfortable. "Thank you for these kind words. I did want balm. Now I know I am not alive in vain. There was a painful doubt. But all is well. I do still annoy our blessed public services; I can go on. On and on and up and up. Greet the unseen with a cheer. Hooray! Not much else to greet, Lomas. Lots of that, though."

Lomas sat back. "You mean to say you haven't anything new from your post mortems?"

"Oh yes, I have. All is strange and new—but negative. Washin' out everything we had before. Isn't that nice? Yet leadin' nowhere. Thanks to the little blind devil of chance—with the co-operation of another devil or so—not blind devils—human devils." The tea arrived and he sipped it. "My only aunt! Where do you buy your tea? Why do you? A larger mystery of evil. Well, well. Takin' the constable. Underwood told you?"

"He told me you had suspicions of the constable—thought he'd done a burglary at the place, and found you were wrong when you examined him. I suppose that's what you mean by telling me you've washed out everything we had. You haven't. Only what you invented yourself. We never did suspect the constable."

"No. Loyal force, the police force."

"It would take more than some traces a fence had been climbed to make me suspicious of a constable of good record."

"Very proper. Faith before facts. Yet facts have uses. A dark man did leave bits of his hand on that fence. You only have to find him and fit them on and the case is finished. He wasn't your constable. The constable's hands haven't lost those bits. Only suffered when the fire escape ran over him. But that wasn't what killed him. Cause

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of death, shooting. Lead bullet entered the left of throat, lodged in spine."

"Good gad!" Lomas exclaimed.

"Yes. It is instructive. About the time of the fire a dark man left Mr. Smith's premises by the back in a hurry, met your constable and shot him. Now you know why the poor beggar didn't ring the fire alarm, why he was grovelling in the gutter when the fire escape came and hit him. Speechless. Helpless. Too bad. Must have died thinkin' the whole world was at work to do him down. The devil had some fun last night, Lomas. And he isn't finished yet." Reggie put a pill box on the table. "There's the bullet which killed your constable."

Lomas examined it and made a noise of disgust.

"As you say. I can swear it's .455. I can suggest it's from a service revolver. But it's so flattened we'll never link it with any particular revolver. Can't even make out the grooves of the rifling. That's what the fire escape did, running over him. Obliterated evidence of the murderer. The devil's own chance. Further to that—" He produced another pill box. "Scrap of brass from mud in the gutter. Cartridge case. But also crushed by the fire brigade. Individual markin' of the particular revolver again destroyed. Great fun, this job. Turnin' to our Mr. Smith. Previous to cremation—probably not quite dead when his cottage began to burn—he also was shot."

"The devil he was!" Lomas exclaimed.

"Yes. Plenty of the diabolic about. Lead bullet fired into left cheek, lodged in base of skull. Also a .455 and probably from a service revolver. But mushroomed and split. There you are." A third pill box was presented to Lomas. "So that also don't help us to the particular revolver and its owner. Another devilish comic chance. No cartridge case visible by Mr. Smith. Not chance that. The forethought of the killer. Shrewd operator, effective operator. Very good fire he managed. You may say he deserved the devil's own luck. But I resent it. I object to the order of things takin' sides with a killer. Not done, Lomas."

Lomasshrugged. "Nouse quarrelling with the cussedness of things."

"Oh yes. Yes. That's what I'm for. Or what are we for?"

"My dear Reginald! Keep to the facts. You put up a very queer story. Someone broke into Smith's house, shot him, set the place on fire, got out over the back fence, shot the constable and went off. Several difficulties, aren't there?"

"It's all difficulties. Only it happened."

"The men were shot. But why should any man break into a poor place like Smith's and shoot him?"

"I didn't say he broke in. Only said he broke things gettin' out. Smith may have let him in. Why he shot Smith I haven't the slightest idea. Who was Mr. Smith that somebody needed to shoot him? Up to you."

"A very odd thing nobody heard those two shots."

"Oh no. No. Such a row from the railway and the road round there a little revolver fire wouldn't count. That was foreseen by our effective operator. You're wastin' time. Only useful question now, who was Smith and what was he? Any contribution from Underwood? Anything from the fire brigade?"

Lomas took up his telephone and talked to Superintendent Bell. "Mr. Fortune's come in. He says the constable was shot. What? Oh, Underwood's with you, is he? Bring him along."

Bell and Underwood came in, a certain grim and reproachful satisfaction on Underwood's face as he met Reggie's eye. "Yes, your constable's clear," said Reggie. "He died doing his duty. What are we doing about it?"

Bell spoke. "I was just saying to Underwood, you'd work it out so he had justice done to him, Mr. Fortune."

"Shall I? I wonder."

"Well, you have." Bell turned to Lomas. "This makes it a big affair, sir."

"Quite." Lomas made a grimace. "Go all out, Bell. Smith was shot too. Both by a .455 service revolver. How many thousand of them are there in circulation?" He pointed to Reggie's exhibits. "You'll never prove which one fired the shots. That's what Mr. Fortune's given us to work on."

"Ah!" Bell frowned over the damaged bullets and cartridge case. "Too bad."

The Burnt Tout

"Not all I've given you," Reggie murmured. "Dark man with skin off his hand the operator. What dark men did our Mr. Smith know who wanted him dead? Any ideas, Underwood?"

"No, sir, I haven't, not yet. But I can tell you this. That constable told the chap on the next beat he'd seen a man and a woman hanging about Cherrywood Lane several nights lately."

"Oh! Man with woman. Well, well. Any woman known in Mr. Smith's life?"

Underwood shook his head. "I can't get a thing about Smith's life. He came to that old cottage four years ago. Lived alone. The neighbours say he kept himself to himself. They think he was retired, he didn't seem to have any regular occupation, but he was off for the day quite a bit in the summer."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. "Retired early in life. The corpse wasn't fifty." He turned to Bell. "Undersized man, skinny, fair, recedin' brow, not much nose, a lot of upper lip, prominent rotten teeth and a bit bandy—might have mixed with horses—and no known occupation these five years. Suggest anyone known to the police?"

"A little monkey-faced man." Bell shook his head. "There's quite a few of them about. Not enough, is it? What about his finger-prints?"

"Fingers won't print. Too burnt. Effective operator, the operator on Smith. Are we downhearted? Yes. Anything heard of the fire brigade?"

Bell gave an apologetic grin. "They're not helpful, sir. I had a few words with 'em. They've sent up a bit of stuff. They say none of it's any good, but there won't be any more. Not by them."

"Happy to annoy. Well, well. Let's try again. Where is their stuff?"

"I was just having it looked over."

"Me too." Reggie stood up. "Come on."

Lomas went with him asking, "What do you expect to find, Reginald?"

"Who Smith was."

"Out of the ashes of his furniture?"

"Yes. That is so."

"Hopeful, aren't you?"

"No. Still cling to faith in the human mind. My mind. Though much discouraged by this case."

They went into a large, bare room where two solemn men were arranging on a trestle table what looked like odds and ends from a dust bin.

"Good gad!" Lomas put up his eyeglass. "They have sent you a mixed grill, Reginald."

Reggie wandered round the table and inspected a little collection of metal, separating bit from bit with studious care.

Lomas came to inspect the results. "One—two—three pennies," he chuckled. "Damme, is this what you asked for?"

"Yes. And two brass key holes," Reggie mumbled. "Yes, not so bad, the fire brigade." He set apart another scrap of brass, which was round and with a surface deeply calcined. "They did get it. There you are. Case of the cartridge that shot Smith. And it might be any cartridge's case. All marks burnt off."

"Brilliant!" said Lomas. "And so we flop again." He turned to the two solemn men who were piecing together broken glass and strips of charred wood. "What the deuce do you fellows think you're doing, playing jigsaw puzzles?"

"Beg pardon, sir. Our instructions pictures were wanted."

"Oh, damme, carry on." Lomas lit a cigarette.

"Sorry you're bored, Lomas," said Reggie. "This is difficult for you." He went to help the puzzle builders. "Two largish pictures, what—and other bits? Yes." He worked with them, drawing from the heap of debris fragments of scorched cardboard. Portions of picture took form—a portly frock coat, a bearded face in one.

"Magnificent, Reginald!" Lomas cried. "His Majesty King Edward VII. Now we know all. Smith was loyal to the Crown." And Underwood hardly concealed a grin. "So a bad, bold Bolshie slew him."

"Yes, we are not amused," Reggie murmured. "Think again, Lomas. Edward VII but not in state. Edward VII but also a bit of a horse. His Majesty leading in one of his winners. So our Mr. Smith took an interest in horse racin'."

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"God bless you, Reginald!" Lomas laughed. "You have a great imagination."

"No, I believe evidence," Reggie snapped. "Look at it. Smith had one other big picture. You see."

"Sky and grass!" Lomas scoffed.

"Oh, my dear chap! And legs. Legs of a horse. Obviously a race horse. And this bit—this is a jockey's leg. Now wait——" He put together small charred pieces.

"More grass," Lomas shrugged.

"As you say. And underneath—HUM—ST—I9—" He drew back. "Some horse who won a big race, what?"

"Humorist!" Bell exclaimed. "Derby winner. Five or six years back."

"Thanks very much." Reggie turned to him. "There you are. Our Mr. Smith was a follower of the turf."

"Ah!" Bell's stolid face was excited. "That's what you were hinting before, sir."

"I was. Yes. From his look, his make, his bandy legs. Horsey fellow. Product of the stable."

"You have given us a line." Bell frowned, in labour with thought.

"Yes, that is so," said Reggie. "Come on." He led the way back to Lomas' room, stood before the fire and gazed at Bell. "You were going to tell me——" he asked blandly.

"I wasn't—I don't know," Bell protested.

"My dear chap! Humorist. Why did that particular Derby winner interest our Smith?"

"Humorist—he wasn't the favourite," Bell muttered. "That Derby would be good for the bookmakers. Wait a minute; Humorist's year. Something in the back of my mind. I've got it! That was the year of the big bank frauds. You remember, Mr. Lomas."

"I do not," Lomas cried. "Damme, where are we getting to? From these murders to a Derby years ago and then to a bank fraud! What's the next wild jump?"

"There's nothing wild, sir," said Bell stolidly. "It was a case of a clerk—name of Gray—Herbert Gray—forged cheques for a matter of ten thousand pounds—spent it backing horses, he said. We got

him all right, and he got five years' penal servitude. His story, he was lured into betting by a chap he met in a bar, and when he lost all he had this fellow put into his head he could get it back playing tricks at the bank. You know. The dear old game. Help himself out of the big accounts just temporary, and when he won put the money back. Well, it nearly came off, so he said. He plunged on Humorist, at a good price, and the bank wouldn't have been down a penny if he'd got his winnings. But he didn't. He never could find his precious pal after Humorist won. That was what he put up for a defence. It didn't go well, this pal stuff. Gray handed us nothing much to trace the fellow—said they met in one pub and another—the fellow's name was Archer and he gave out to be in with stables and big bookies, special tips and special terms. We worked his pubs, shady places, betting dives, but we never got near anybody passing as Archer, and Gray's description was no good. So we gave up—taking it Gray had been telling the tale—inventing this pal, trying to pass for a poor fool led on and done down so his counsel could pull sob stuff—that is what the judge thought. But now look. Five or six years ago Humorist won and Gray went to gaol. Four or five years ago Joe Smith retired to live on his means in that shy cottage. He was horsey, he had something special on Humorist. Just lately Gray's time in jug was up. And here we have Smith killed and his place burnt to hide who he was." Bell looked with respectful pride from Reggie to Lomas. "I'd say Mr. Fortune's got it, sir."

Reggie's eyelids drooped. He left Lomas to answer.

"Quite good, Bell," Lomas pronounced. "Go to work. Pass the word for Herbert Gray. You'll have to check up on Smith too."

"Yes, sir. Can do, I reckon. When we put some of the old touts through it. Come on, young fellow." Bell bustled Underwood out.

Reggie leaned back against the mantelpiece looking at nothing.

"Waiting for apologies, Reginald?" Lomas smiled. "They are offered. Forgive my dull doubts. One of your best things. We should have been nowhere without you."

"You would. Yes," Reggie murmured. In a sleep-walking manner he moved to the cigar boxes, took a cigar and lit it and stood blowing smoke rings and sighed, "I wonder."

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"What?" Lomas cocked a curious eyebrow. "Something more up our ingenious sleeve?"

"Oh no. No. Sound man, Bell. I should say he's right. I did get it. You're right. Must catch Gray. Must trace Smith."

"Quite. All the pieces fit, don't they?"

"The pieces? Yes. Every one. And what's the picture? Nasty queer picture."

"Devilish business," Lomas shrugged.

"As you say. Devil is obtrusive." He turned on Lomas and spoke vehemently. "Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness. Pray, innocent, and beware the foul fiend."

So all the machinery of the police was driven at high pressure to find Herbert Gray, and the underworld of racing was searched for men who could be made to remember Joe Smith, and newspapers were encouraged to scream on their top notes that two murders lay behind the mystery of the Barnham fire, and call on any creature who knew anything of Gray or Smith to stand and deliver.

From this Mr. Fortune withdrew himself and tried to forget all about it in designing a new lily garden. Several days passed. He had sat down after breakfast to paint a water colour of the effect of the working plans for his sceptical wife, when the telephone called him.

"Bell speaking, Mr. Fortune. Could you come out to Hampstead Heath at once? Car on the way for you. I'll meet you there."

"What for?" Reggie moaned. But the telephone was dumb.

The policeman who drove the car could tell no more. When he stopped it on the ridgeway across the Heath, Reggie jumped out to meet Bell with a bitter cry, "I hate you——" He stopped. Bell's massive countenance was shrunken and pallid, his eyes red. "Oh, my dear chap! You're driving yourself too hard."

"I'm all right, sir. We have to go hard on that Gray case. Now you come along here, please."

He turned off the road down a track which led across broken ground between trees and thickets of gorse and bramble. Some two hundred yards on, a little party of men stood about a bulky man who lay prone. Blood had oozed from a wound in his head. Blood stained the sand.

Reggie contemplated him a moment then gazed at Bell. "You think so? Yes, you may be right. But why—why? Oh my Lord, why are we?" He dropped on his knees by the body. . . .

When he got up, he gave Bell a look of dreary, patient sympathy, took him by the arm and led him away and spoke in his ear. "Dead quite a while. Might be twelve hours ago—or more. Cause of death, shot through left cheek bone, by a largish bullet. He died at once. Shot was fired from some distance, behind him on the left. Say from about here." He stopped at the side of the track, he wandered to and fro, in and out among the gorse. "Oh yes. As stated. Two cartridge cases recently fired." He examined them. "Cartridges of a .455 service revolver. As used for our Mr. Smith and our constable. That's what you expected?"

"I did think it looked like a revolver wound." Bell spoke with glum satisfaction. "And these cartridge cases, they have clear marks."

"Yes, indentations of striker quite definite. Easy to prove they came from a particular revolver—when you get the right one. Do you think you have got it?"

"I haven't got one at all—yet."

"Oh. Haven't got Herbert Gray either?"

"No, sir, not yet."

"Pity."

"How do you mean?"

"My Bell! If the revolver which shot Smith and the constable is the revolver which shot this fellow, pity you didn't get Gray before the deed was done."

Bell glowered. "We can't do miracles. We're working, believe me. We'll have Gray soon."

"A felt want," Reggie murmured. "Any reason to believe it was the same revolver?"

"What do you think yourself? Three murders by shooting with a revolver of the same type!"

"Does indicate the same operator. Yes. That's what you wanted me to say. I've said it. Which isn't proof. We had a reason why Gray should kill Smith—and the policeman after. Why should he kill this fellow? Who is the fellow?"

"Ah! That clinches the whole thing. This fellow—he owned a string of pubs, name of George Foat. But he made his money as a low-down bookmaker, and Joe Smith was a tout of his. We'd only just dug that up. Found some old-timers who knew Smith as Chatty Joe working for a street-corner bookie, Flash George. That was Foat. And they both faded out after Humorist's win."

"I see, yes. With their hearts so full of glee and their pockets full of gold—out of smashing Gray's life—and so Gray drags along as soon as he can and kills 'em—that's the story. Not a nice story. And we have to hang him. Not a nice job, our job. There may be heaven, there must be hell. However. More evidence required. Send this animal, Foat, to the dead house. Good-bye. Get Gray. The sooner, the safer."

Some hours later he rang up Bell. "Fortune speaking. About the animal Foat. One bullet extracted from brain. Only one. But grooving good and clear; .455 service revolver, easy to identify. If and when found. Got it? Got Gray?"

"I have, sir," Bell boomed triumph. "Gray, I mean, not the revolver. Not yet. Gray's just being brought along."

"Congratulations. Me too," said Reggie in a hurry.

He found Bell and Underwood in conference with Lomas. "Well, well." He surveyed them. "Todgers's can do it when it chooses, what? Flowers for all. Oh, the cleverness of us. How was the man Gray when found?"

"Not passing under his own name, Mr. Fortune. He's called himself Shirley, his wife's maiden name."

"Oh, there's a wife? Jolly!"

"Yes, he was married before he went wrong. We knew that. He kept it dark. He'd married too young, you see, his bank didn't like their men to marry early. It's a common rule, of course. But I shouldn't wonder that was one reason why Gray ran off the rails. Wanted more money somehow. When he crashed his wife was away having a baby. His counsel didn't use that at his trial. Rather queer, leaving it out of all the sob stuff he pulled about Gray being a poor young innocent led astray."

"Get on, Bell," said Lomas impatiently. "I want to deal with Gray."

But Reggie drawled, "Baby living?"

"No, sir. It died. Well, you see, taking his wife's maiden name when he came out of prison, Gray covered his tracks. She'd put Mrs. to it, she's Mrs. Shirley now and doing well, secretary to a rich woman, Lady Preston, that soap man's widow, the philanthropist. But she didn't go back on Gray. She got him a job through her employer's interest. He's been in a garage quite respectable. I don't know if we'd have traced him but for publishing his portrait and description in the papers. The porter at the flats where she lives recognized him and put us on to him. But there's more than that. Underwood's got some of Smith's neighbours swearing they've seen Gray hanging round the lane there."

"When?" Reggie asked.

"Of nights. More than one night," said Underwood. "They can't put it more definite. To my mind, that makes it better evidence, they're not swearing to him because they know we want him."

"Yes. I should say they're being honest with the facts," Reggie murmured. "So are you. And fair. Very fair, Bell."

"You notice the evidence of the neighbours fits what we had before, sir," said Underwood. "The constable who was killed told his mate he'd seen a man hanging round Smith's place."

"I had noticed, yes. That would fit. Same like everything else. But the constable said a man and a woman."

"Ah," Bell frowned. "You mean Gray's wife?"

Reggie moved in his chair. "Mean there's something that doesn't fit. At last."

"It fits well enough," said Lomas. "These people only saw Gray. But his wife may have been there to help him all the same."

"Well enough!" Reggie started up. "Oh my Lomas! You shock me. Anybody may have been there any time. No proof yet Gray was there the right time."

"Quite. We'll get it," said Lomas. "I shouldn't wonder if we get it out of him, Reginald. He ought to be here by now."

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The telephone discovered that he was.

In Bell's room they sat down to examine him. Bell boomed intimidating questions. "Is your real name Herbert Gray? Why do you call yourself Shirley? You've served a five years' sentence for forgery and embezzlement, haven't you? Why didn't you report to the police when you knew you were wanted?"

But Gray would only repeat one answer. "What am I brought here for?"

Reggie watched him with dreary curiosity. He sat on the edge of his chair, he would not look at anyone straight, or at anything for long. His dark face had been meant to please. Well enough in a common-place way, it invited contempt by its exhibition of stupid, angry fear, the more unlovely for his elegance of waved, shining black hair and spruce clothes. His hands worked hard washing themselves.

"You're brought here to answer questions about the murder of Joseph Smith, of Cherrywood Lane, Barnham, on the night of October 13. And of Police Constable Browning, also of Barnham, on the same date," Bell went on. "I warn you anything you say may be used in evidence."

"I have nothing to say," Gray muttered. "I know nothing about them."

"Do you tell me you didn't know Smith? I put it to you; Joseph Smith, passing as Chatty Joe, was a man you used to bet with before you went to prison. You said at your trial a man called Archer lured you into betting and showed you how to rob the bank." Bell passed across the table a photograph of Smith's dead face. "Isn't that the man?"

Gray peered at it and shuddered. "That—that—I never saw anybody like that."

"Pick it up," Reggie said sharply. "Look at it."

Gray's hands came forward shaking, lifted it and dropped it again. "I tell you I never saw him," he screamed. Reggie sat back in his chair and glanced at Bell.

But Bell was booming, "Not like that, you said. Ah, that's after he was burnt. Where were you on the night of the 13th?"

"At home. In bed," Gray muttered.

"Where was your wife?" Lomas snapped.

Gray's mouth came open. "My wife?" he muttered. "At Lady Preston's."

Reggie was writing. He passed the paper to Lomas and Lomas read and caressed his chin and stared at Gray.

"And other nights?" Bell was asking. "Do you tell me nobody ever saw you round Smith's place at night?"

"I wasn't there," Gray answered.

"What about last night? Did you know George Foat, the book-maker Smith worked for?"

"I never heard of him."

"Heard of him as Flash George, eh? Where were you when George Foat was shot on Hampstead Heath?"

"When was the man shot?"

"Last night, I told you."

"No, you didn't. You're setting traps for me. I won't answer you any more. You have nothing against me. You can't have. You can't keep me here. Let me go."

Lomas put the paper with Reggie's message in front of Bell. He read it, but there was no change in the grim threat of his eyes as he stared at Gray again. "You're being kept here," he growled, "for enquiries. I give it you straight, I don't believe you've told me the truth."

"I have. I told you the truth before," Gray cried, and as he was taken out he screamed, "I'm not afraid of you."

"That wasn't true anyhow," Bell grunted, and turned on Reggie. "Eh, Mr. Fortune?"

"Oh no. No. Deadly afraid. However." Reggie tapped the paper and read from it. "'His hands not damaged.' So Gray was not the dark man who skinned his hand on Smith's fence that night. A second bit that don't fit. Crucial bit. Throws all our picture out." He met a concentration of displeasure with reproachful amusement. "Sorry to annoy. Got to break it up and try again."

"I don't agree, Reginald," said Lomas sharply. "We have evidence

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Gray and his wife were there. It may very well have been the woman hurt her hands."

"Oh no. No." Reggie was shocked. "Wasn't the woman. Wasn't any woman. Hairy skin. Man's skin. Man's hair. Face the nasty fact, Lomas. Our determined, effective operator wasn't Gray. It was somebody you haven't got near." He turned. "Or have you, Bell?"

"I don't follow," Bell complained. "What are you suggesting?"

"My dear chap! Nothing unkind. Shuffle the bits of the puzzle and reconsider 'em. What have we got? Gray had a mortal grudge against Smith and Foat. Gray had been looking up Smith. The picture we made was that he shot Smith for revenge, set the place on fire—knocking holes in the pipes and lighting up the gas—to hide that Smith had been murdered. Then he got out at the back and shot the constable who stopped him. Quite good. Only it wasn't Gray got out. Subsequently Foat was shot by a revolver of the sort used on Smith and the policeman. Did look like Gray too. Though rather wild of him to go and kill again when he knew we were on to him. However. Sort of thing a desperate fellow might do. Do you think he is a desperado? No. Another little difficulty. Why did Foat go out to Hampstead Heath at night so he could be shot from the bushes conveniently?"

"Ah, that got me, Mr. Fortune," Bell broke in. "I've had some work done on it. Foat's son says he has no idea why his father went to the Heath, denies to know anything about Gray except what's been in the papers just now."

"Curiouser and curiouser. Fat publicans and bookies don't walk the Heath much, cold October nights."

"No sir. You've got to remember Foat didn't live so far away—matter of two miles—down in Kentish Town. Still, it is queer."

"Yes, I think so. Obvious explanation. Foat went to meet somebody he didn't want to meet at home. Why? Who?"

"You might say Gray got him to go out there somehow," Bell said slowly. "That's an old game, you know, sir. A woman, might be."

"Gray's wife, begad!" Lomas exclaimed.

Reggie lay back and looked through the murky window. "Yes, as you were saying," he murmured. "There are objections, Lomas. The man Foat, knowing his tout, Smith, had just been murdered, knowing there was a hue and cry for Gray, lets Mrs. Gray vamp him out to Hampstead Heath in the dark. Uncommon reckless of Foat."

"Not sound, Reginald," Lomas smiled. "He didn't know she was Gray's wife. She was passing as Mrs. Shirley. She might have passed as anybody to him. And we know she was working with Gray over Smith. Why not over Foat too?"

"Yes. It could be," Reggie mumbled.

"Excuse me, sir, I don't think so," said Underwood. "The fact is we don't really know Gray's wife was round Smith's place. I've had him identified by the neighbours but not her. Only the constable spoke to a woman. They'd not noticed one. I showed 'em a photo we snapped of her too. Nothing doing."

"Failure of observation, that's all," Lomas shrugged. "Doesn't alter the fact Gray's wife has worked in with him."

"No, sir," said Underwood without pretence of agreement. He took out his pocket-book. "Would you look at her photo?"

"What of it?" Lomas frowned.

The photograph showed a slight woman in austere clothes. Her face had been pretty but was aged and strained and acquainted with grief.

"Not the sort of woman who'd cut much ice as a vamp, to my mind," said Underwood.

Reggie drew a long breath. "God help us!" he murmured, rare words on his lips. "Well, Lomas?" he asked drearily.

"I agree," Lomas nodded. "She's nobody's lure now, poor thing. That wastrel Gray! What a life for her! He may have had another woman, though."

"He may. Yes. The world is so full of a number of things, I think we should all be as happy as kings. Another woman in Gray's jolly life. Sort of woman who'd help him on from murder to murder with the hunt at his heels. Yes. She could exist. I don't believe in her till compelled. You're not bein' rational, Lomas. Fundamental rule of

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investigation, don't invent more theories than you have to. No need to invent a woman for the case. We have a man in it unaccounted for—man who left his skin on Smith's fence."

"Good gad! You mean he worked Foat's murder too. He knew a thing or two about Smith—why not about Foat? I believe you have it, Reginald." Lomas turned to Bell. "Try it this way. Two racing sharps murdered—by another one—a gang break up."

"Some pal of Smith and Foat?" said Bell dubiously. "Well, that might be, of course. I—— Hullo! What have you got?"

A man had come into the room with a "Beg pardon, Superintendent, I thought you'd like to have this at once." He laid on the table something wrapped in a handkerchief. "Found in Gray's office at the garage, in the waste paper basket, under some envelopes and stuff. Nothing else from the garage. Nothing to signify from Gray's flat."

Bell turned back the handkerchief. "Revolver," he said with grim satisfaction. "Service revolver, .455, old gun, been cleaned. Have you tried it for finger-prints, Naylor?"

"Yes, sir. Can't get anything."

"I thought as much," Bell grunted. "Wiped careful." His sunken eyes gleamed at Reggie. "Not too bad though, eh?"

"Oh no. No. Very good," Reggie sighed. "Very useful. Take it away. Fire three or four rounds and bring me the bullets and the cartridge cases. Get my last exhibits, Underwood." As the two went out he leaned back and contemplated Bell. "Now we should not be long," he murmured sleepily. "Where was the man Gray when arrested?"

"In the garage, sir, he'd just got back from lunch. Our men missed him at his flat and went round there after him. You see? He'd heard them asking for him, only just time to dump the gun. He was half salesman, half book-keeper; the office was the one place handy."

Underwood came back with the cartridge cases found on the Heath, the bullet taken from Foat's head and, as Reggie spread them out on a white blotting pad, Naylor brought in four bullets, four cartridge cases on a saucer.

Reggie inspected them . . . examined them through a magnifying

glass . . . He looked up with a twist of a plaintive smile. "Quite conclusive, Bell. Even to the naked eye." Bell leaned across him. His finger pointed at dents in the cartridge cases on the saucer, at other dents in the cases on the blotting paper. "Isn't that nice?"

"That'll do, Naylor," Bell growled, and Naylor reluctantly departed, and Bell pored over the cartridges and the heads of Lomas and Underwood joined his.

"Yes, it will," said Reggie softly. "It has done. Marks of striker quite different. Revolver which killed Foat was not the revolver found in Gray's waste paper. One more bit which won't fit. Absolute and final destruction of our pretty picture."

"My oath!" Bell glowered at him. "And what then? Gray didn't do the murders, but he had a revolver of the right make and he only thought of getting rid of it when we were on top of him. You believe that?"

"No." Reggie smiled sadly. "Too hard, Bell. No use trying. Another possibility."

"Damme, it's clear enough, Bell," Lomas cried. "This gun was planted in Gray's office to put the murders on him. Who did that? The murderer. Who is he then? Some rascal that knew all about Gray and Smith and Foat—he was in with those two sharps—one of their gang—they'd broken him or he was afraid they would. I told you that was the line."

"You did. Yes," Reggie murmured. "Racing gang break and feud. Quite good. Now confirmed."

"Well, it is in a way," Bell said slowly. "But look. That means the fellow was in the garage where Gray was—working with him."

"Why not?" Lomas shrugged. "Go to it."

"And the other end," said Reggie. "You found people who knew Smith was Foat's tout. Why not find people who know somebody else mixed up with them?"

"You take that on, Underwood." Bell stood up. "I'm going round to the garage."

"Me too," said Reggie. "Do you mind? Like to see the people—if any."

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"I can do with you, sir." Bell gave him a rueful grin. "In this case, special. What do you reckon to hand me next? Gray's a martyred saint? Never robbed the bank at all?"

"Oh, my Bell! Nerves!"

The garage was small but opulently respectable, its open front showed a few good used cars for sale and behind them a cubicle of an office. From that, as they made their way to it, a woman hurried, a man following her heavily. She was pale and distressed. The man, a fat fellow, revealed agitation. "Anything I can do, you know," he was saying. She did not answer, she scurried past them and out.

Bell confronted him. "Are you the proprietor, Mr. Walker?"

"I am." The man mopped his brow.

"That was the wife of your clerk Shirley—real name Gray—wasn't it? What was she doing here?"

"Who the hell are you?" Walker scowled. Bell showed him a card. "My Lord, more of 'em!" He lumbered back to the office calling, "Come on." He slammed the door behind them. "Want to know what the lady was doing? What do you think she was doing, poor soul? Asking what the police took her husband away for."

"How did she know we'd taken him?"

Walker's little eyes flashed. "Because I told her, see? Any ruddy objection from you, Superintendent? You send and pinch a good man of mine. Why wouldn't I let his wife know? What's the game?"

"A good man," Bell repeated. "You know Gray's record?"

"I did not. Only knew him as Shirley. But he's made good with me."

"Cool off. You've heard what he had in his waste paper basket here?"

"I know what your chaps took out of it."

"Ever seen that revolver before, Mr. Walker?"

Walker looked ugly. "Come again. I haven't seen that one. And I haven't seen any ruddy revolver since I was demobbed. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Yes. How do you suppose the revolver got into the waste paper basket in this office?"

"Search me!" Walker's little eyes were cunning.

"Ever had anything to do with racing, Mr. Walker?"

"Not me. Mug's game."

"Some of your employees perhaps?"

"Look here, I've had enough." Walker banged the table. "I'm well known, I am. And my chaps are straight; I've had 'em all for years. Long before Gray came. I'm not going to have you throw mud at them or me, see?"

"You've nothing to be afraid of——"

"Afraid, my foot!" Walker laughed.

"——if you're straight with me. Who uses this office except Gray and you and your people?"

"Nobody uses it but Gray and me. Anybody might come in, customers, travellers, dam' all."

"I see. Has anybody been in to-day?"

Again the cunning look gleamed in Walker's eyes. "Yes, there has, Superintendent. A very queer customer. Do you happen to know anything about him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just came into my head you might. Of course you wouldn't send anybody to play tricks here before your chaps came official, would you?"

"You take it I did not." Bell glowered at him. "Well?"

"Well, it's funny, that's all. While Gray had gone home to lunch, a chap did come into the office. The man in charge outside asked him what he wanted, and he told the tale his car had been stolen and he'd been rung up by us to say a car of his had been left in our yard and what about it. He gave the name of Raper, car a Watkin six. My man went to the yard to enquire. No such car there, no car left at all. The chap cursed and quit quick. How about it, Superintendent? Just after that funny stuff your blokes come along and pinch Gray and they find a revolver in the waste paper here all nice and handy for 'em. What a game!"

"Go and get this man of yours," Bell growled, and as Walker lumbered off, turned on Reggie. "If it's true——"

"As he was sayin'," Reggie answered. "Then what a game!"

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Walker brought his man, who told the same story, described Raper as a beefy, flash gent, but could add nothing more.

Next morning Mrs. Fortune's tea had just come to her bedside when the telephone in the room began to ring. Reggie sat up with a jerk and an exceeding bitter cry and grabbed the receiver. "Speakin', yes, confound you."

"We have that Raper's car, sir," said the voice of Bell. "Found abandoned out St. Alban's way. Broken down."

"Oh! Raper is real. Well, well. What about him?"

"Enquiries proceeding, sir. About the car. There's some stains on the inside, might be blood. Would you go out and have a look at it?"

"I will. I must." Reggie rang off and sprang out of bed. "The Gray case, Joan."

"That poor woman," said Mrs. Fortune.

"Oh yes. And poor me," Reggie answered as he fled.

A bright young Inspector drove him away expounding the efficiency of the police force. "We sent out a general warning for a Watkin six. A patrol remembered seeing one on a bit of waste ground beside the river Colne yesterday morning with nobody in it or near, and they found it still there last night—licence in the name of E. Garnet Raper. They couldn't move it. So I went out. Carburettor choked with sand. Very dusty, off the road there. I gave the car the once over with a flash light. No damage, but I found what looks like marks of blood inside."

"I wonder." Reggie's face was without expression. "Good work. Very good work. Yes. Why off the road? Why by a river?"

"Chap who drove it there wanted to stop where he wouldn't be noticed for a bit."

"That is indicated." Reggie closed his eyes. . . .

"Here we are." The Inspector drove off the high road into an unfenced lane with deep sandy ruts. It led over waste land to a ford in the river which the high road crossed by a bridge. Near the water stood Raper's car, guarded by a policeman.

The Inspector opened its door and demonstrated. "You see, dark stains on the carpet there, and here in the crinkles of the leather a sort of purple smear."

"Yes. As you say. Provisionally blood. Some days old. Easy to verify." Reggie turned away. "Car has stood some time."

"I should say it was left here night before last."

"So should I." Reggie gazed at him. "And why here, young fellow?"

"To be out of the way while he saw what was inside. Then he couldn't start it and had to quit."

"Yes. Not bad. Why didn't he have it fetched?"

"He'd stolen it, he daren't."

"Might be the reason. Might be another." Reggie wandered away towards the river. It made a wide expanse of shallow water set about with rushes except at the ford. "What's that?" He pointed. Lying on a tuft of rushes was a revolver.

"Good Lord!" the Inspector gasped. "Of course it was dark when I examined the car, Mr. Fortune. I had no chance to see the gun." He plunged at it. . . .

In Bell's room a dark, full-bodied man, whose too smart clothes seemed too tight, sat before Lomas and Bell and Underwood when Reggie opened the door.

"Your statement is, you never had any acquaintance with Smith or Foat," Bell was saying. "You were a bookmaker, weren't you? My information is you ran Foat."

Lomas' eye met Reggie's. "This is Mr. Garnet Raper, Fortune."

"Oh yes, I see." Reggie sat down and wrote for Lomas to read.

Raper had answered Bell in the husky voice of the ring. "Your information's a lie then."

"Foat's son says his father had a telephone message from you after Smith was murdered. The day his father was murdered. Why should he lie?"

As Raper's tan gloved hand took out a flaring silk handkerchief and wiped his mouth, Reggie looked up at him. "It's all wrong anyhow," he answered. "I never did. Somebody's doing the dirty on me."

"Take off your gloves, Raper," said Reggie.

Raper took no notice. Raper went on talking in a hoarse hurry. "A fake call, if my name was used. A ruddy fake. Some swine's

The Burnt Tout

leading you up the garden, to hide himself. I'm a well known man and never anything against me. I——"

"Why don't you take your gloves off?" Reggie asked plaintively. "Because your hand's hurt? Where was it hurt? On Smith's fence?"

Raper swore at him. "No, it wasn't. I scratched it on the door of my car."

"There is blood in your car. Yes. Skin of hand on the fence though."

"Not mine. I take my oath it's not," Raper roared. "Have you found my car? My car was stolen."

"Was it? Where from?"

Raper swallowed. "Outside my house. Day before yesterday."

"Oh. But you didn't inform the police. Well, well."

"Your car has been found, Raper," said Lomas. "So has your revolver."

"Where? I don't know what you mean. I never had a revolver."

"Service revolver taken out of the water beside your car. That revolver was used to shoot Foat. Any explanation?"

"It's all a fake," Raper gasped. "My car was stolen, I tell you. You're planting things on me, you——"

"Take him away, Bell," Lomas said sharply, and, cursing them all, Raper was hustled out.

Reggie rose wearily. "I shall have to see his beastly hands," he moaned. . . .

A little while afterwards he came into Lomas' room. "Yes. Back of right hand flayed as required. So that is that." He lit a cigar and sank into the easiest chair. "You'll hang him all right."

"Many thanks." Lomas chuckled. "Very neat work, Reginald."

"It is. Yes." Reggie's eyes were almost closed.

"Better dead, isn't he? Nasty bit of work. That poor devil Gray! He has been through it. I take it this fat brute was the power behind the scenes at Gray's ruin—planned the whole ramp. Not the first time we've had hints of a brain in the background when a young fool who could get at big money was led on to bet. Gray came out and looked for Smith, the only one of the rogues he knew. I suppose

Smith rounded on Raper, a good chance to squeeze him. Raper got the wind up—Gray and Smith between 'em could land him in gaol for a long term. So he wiped out Smith—and had to kill the constable to get away. Foat wouldn't like that—and Gray was still at large. If Foat and Gray came together they could hang him. Foat also had to go. Raper fixed up a meeting at night on the Heath to talk things over without anyone knowing they met, shot him there, drove out to the Colne and threw the gun in the water. Then the luck turned—about time, too, he'd had it all his own way over Smith and the constable."

"Devilish lucky. Yes," Reggie murmured.

"Quite. But the carburettor getting clogged was deuced lucky for us. If he hadn't had to leave his car there by the water it's long odds we'd never have got him. If the gun had ever been found, he could have sworn it wasn't his, or it had been stolen."

"As you say," Reggie sighed. "Extraordinary luck."

Lomas raised a startled eyebrow. "What's the matter? It's all right about the gun, isn't it?"

"Oh yes. Absolutely. Revolver found by car, revolver which killed Foat. Cartridge and bullet marks identical."

"That settles Raper. And on top of it we have him planting another gun on that wretched Gray. Dam' clever, that effort to cover the breakdown of his car at the waterside. But it leaves him with no defence at all."

"None any good, no." Reggie's eyes opened to a steady, gloomy gaze. "You can see what he's going to say. Gray shot Foat. Gray stole his car, made a sham breakdown by the river and left the gun there half in the water to be found when the car was found."

"Who's going to believe that?" Lomas chuckled.

"Nobody. Not a soul," said Reggie. "That is the humour of it. Something else he'll say: if he was guilty, if he did come to plant a gun in Gray's office, he wouldn't have given himself away using his own name, pretending a 'phone message that his stolen car was there."

"I don't mind." Lomas laughed. "Do you think a jury would fall for it?"

The Burnt Tout

"No. Not a nice case, Lomas."

Lomas stared at him. "Why this oracular melancholy? What is in your wonderful mind? Do you want to throw everything down again?"

"Not me." Reggie squirmed. "No, I do not." He sat up. "However. I must give it you. No doubt Raper shot Smith. And the policeman. His hand was hurt in that murder. But then? We've heard somebody else was watching Smith—suppose Raper lost his revolver there—over a scrap with the policeman—somebody picked it up—having spotted Raper's car—knew then that Raper was the man behind Smith—and watched him—caught Foat and him on the Heath—shot at 'em—two cartridges fired there, you know—killed Foat—went off with Raper's car—left it by the river with a spot of sand in the carburettor and the revolver handy—'phoned Raper his stolen car was at the garage—and dumped another service revolver in Gray's waste paper—thus making a case to hang Raper and wiping out the whole gang. Well?"

"Good gad!" Lomas sat back with a jerk. "You make my flesh creep, Reginald. A great story. Sorry, but I can't buy it. You didn't happen to think it plausible, did you?"

"No. Contrariwise," Reggie murmured. "That's the beauty of it."

"Quite. The pure romance. Your somebody, your mighty subtle, desperate, revengeful killer—that's the wretched Gray. Do you see him in the part?"

Reggie shook his head, blew smoke rings and through them watched Lomas with closing eyes.

"I think not!" Lomas chuckled. "His poor little wife then? Nobody else. Likely, isn't it? And good strong evidence against her!"

"Not a scrap. I said so." Reggie stood up. "But plenty to hang Raper. There you are. Good-bye."

His wife came in upon him as he dressed for dinner. "Oh, Reggie, is there anything about that poor woman?"

Reggie tied his tie. "Mrs. Gray? Oh yes. She's all right. Her husband's cleared. They've got another man."

"I'm so glad." She gazed at the solemn face reflected in the glass. "Aren't you?"

"Yes. Yes," Reggie murmured.

"She's had such a sad life. You know she lost her baby when her husband was put in prison. Lady Preston was talking to me. She'll never be able to have another."

"Oh, I didn't know that," Reggie said slowly. "God help her."

"Well, you have," Mrs. Fortune said.

The Gentleman from Paris

JOHN DICKSON CARR

Carlton House Hotel
Broadway, New-York
14th April, 1849

MY DEAR BROTHER:

Were my hand more steady, Maurice, or my soul less agitated, I should have written to you before this. *All is safe*: so much I tell you at once. For the rest, I seek sleep in vain; not merely because I find myself a stranger and a foreigner in New-York. Listen and judge.

We discussed, I think, the humiliation that a Frenchman must go to England ere he could take passage in a reliable ship for America. The *Britannia* steam-packet departed from Liverpool on the second of the month, and arrived here on the seventeenth. Do not smile, I implore you, when I tell you that my first visit on American soil was to Platt's Saloon, under Wallack's Theatre.

Great God, that voyage!

On my stomach I could hold not even champagne. For one of my height and breadth I was as weak as a child.

"Be good enough," I said to a fur-capped coachman, when I had struggled through the horde of Irish immigrants, "to drive me to some fashionable place of refreshment."

The coachman had no difficulty in understanding my English, which pleased me. And how extraordinary are these "saloons"!

The saloon of M. Platt was loud with the thump of hammers cracking ice, which is delivered in large blocks. Though the hand-coloured gas-globes, and the rose-paintings on the front of the bar-counter, were as fine as we could see at the Three Provincial Brothers

in Paris, yet I confess that the place did not smell so agreeably. A number of gentlemen, wearing hats perhaps a trifle taller than is fashionable at home, lounged at the bar-counter and shouted. I attracted no attention until I called for a sherry cobbler.

One of the "bartenders," as they are called in New-York, gave me a sharp glance as he prepared the glass.

"Just arrived from the Old Country, I bet?" said he in no unfriendly tone.

Though it seemed strange to hear France mentioned in this way, I smiled and bowed assent.

"Italian, maybe?" said he.

This bartender, of course, could not know how deadly was the insult.

"Sir," I replied, "I am a Frenchman."

And now in truth he was pleased! His fat face opened and smiled like a distorted, gold-toothed flower.

"Is that so, now!" he exclaimed. "And what might your name be? Unless"—and here his face darkened with that sudden defensiveness and suspicion which, for no reason I can discern, will often strike into American hearts—"unless," said he, "you don't want to give it?"

"Not at all," I assured him earnestly. "I am Armand de Lafayette, at your service."

My dear brother, what an extraordinary effect!

It was silence. All sounds, even the faint whistling of the gas-jets, seemed to die away in that stone-flagged room. Every man along the line of the bar was looking at me. I was conscious only of faces, mostly with whiskers under the chin instead of down the cheekbones, turned on me in basilisk stare.

"Well, well, well!" almost sneered the bartender. "You wouldn't be no relation of the *Marquis* de Lafayette, would you?"

It was my turn to be astonished. Though our father has always forbidden us to mention the name of our late uncle, due to his republican sympathies, yet I knew he occupied small place in the history of France and it puzzled me to comprehend how these people had heard of him.

The Gentleman from Paris

"The late Marquis de Lafayette," I was obliged to admit, "was my uncle."

"You better be careful, young feller," suddenly yelled a grimy little man with a pistol buckled under his long coat. "We don't like being diddled, we don't."

"Sir," I replied, taking my bundle of papers from my pocket and whacking them down on the bar-counter, "have the goodness to examine my credentials. Should you still doubt my identity, we can then debate the matter in any way which pleases you."

"This is furrin writing," shouted the bartender. "*I can't read it!*"

And then—how sweet was the musical sound on my ear!—I heard a voice addressing me in my own language.

"Perhaps, sir," said the voice, in excellent French and with great stateliness, "I may be able to render you some small service."

The newcomer, a slight man of dark complexion, drawn up under an old shabby cloak of military cut, stood a little way behind me. If I had met him on the boulevards, I might not have found him very prepossessing. He had a wild and wandering eye, with an even wilder shimmer of brandy. He was not very steady on his feet. And yet, Maurice, his manner! It was such that I instinctively raised my hat, and the stranger very gravely did the same.

"And to whom," said I, "have I the honour . . . ?"

"I am Thaddeus Perley, sir, at your service."

"Another furriner!" said the grimy little man, in disgust.

"I am indeed a foreigner," said M. Perley in English, with an accent like a knife. "A foreigner to this dram-shop. A foreigner to this neighbourhood. A foreigner to—" Here he paused, and his eyes acquired an almost frightening blaze of loathing. "Yet I never heard that the reading of French was so *very* singular an accomplishment."

Imperiously—and yet, it seemed to me, with a certain shrinking nervousness—M. Perley came closer and lifted the bundle of papers.

"Doubtless," he said loftily, "I should not be credited were I to translate these. But here," and he scanned several of the papers, "is a letter of introduction in English. It is addressed to President Zachary Taylor from the American minister at Paris."

Again, my brother, what an enormous silence! It was interrupted by a cry from the bartender, who had snatched the documents from M. Perley.

"Boys, this is no diddle," said he. "This gent is the real thing!"

"He ain't!" thundered the little grimy man, with incredulity.

"He is!" said the bartender. "I'll be a son of a roe (*i.e. biche*), if he ain't!"

Well, Maurice, you and I have seen how Paris mobs can change. Americans are even more emotional. In the wink of an eye hostility became frantic affection. My back was slapped, my hand wrung, my person jammed against the bar by a crowd fighting to order me more refreshment.

The name of Lafayette, again and again, rose like a holy diapason. In vain I asked why this should be so. They appeared to think I was joking, and roared with laughter. I thought of M. Thaddeus Perley, as one who could supply an explanation.

But in the first rush towards me M. Perley had been flung backwards. He fell sprawling in some wet stains of tobacco juice on the floor, and now I could not see him at all. For myself, I was weak from lack of food. A full beaker of whisky, which I was obliged to drink because all eyes were on me, made my head reel. Yet I felt compelled to raise my voice above the clamour.

"Gentlemen," I implored them, "will you hear me?"

"Silence for Lafayette!" said a big but very old man, with faded red whiskers. He had tears in his eyes, and he had been humming a catch called "Yankee Doodle." "Silence for Lafayette!"

"Believe me," said I, "I am full of gratitude for your hospitality. But I have business in New-York, business of immediate and desperate urgency. If you will allow me to pay my reckoning . . ."

"Your money's no good here, monseer," said the bartender. "You're going to get liquored-up good and proper."

"But I have no wish, believe me, to become liquored-up! It might well endanger my mission! In effect, I wish to go!"

"Wait a minute," said the little grimy man, with a cunning look. "What *is* this here business?"

You, Maurice, have called me quixotic. I deny this. You have also

called me imprudent. Perhaps you are right; but what choice was left to me?

"Has any gentleman here," I asked, "heard of Madame Thevenet? Madame Thevenet, who lives at number 23 Thomas Street, near Hudson Street?"

I had not, of course, expected an affirmative reply. Yet, in addition to one or two snickers at mention of the street, several nodded their heads.

"Old miser woman?" asked a sportif character, who wore chequered trousers.

"I regret, sir, that you correctly describe her. Madame Thevenet is very rich. And I have come here," cried I, "to put right a damnable injustice!"

Struggle as I might, I could not free myself.

"How's that?" asked half a dozen.

"Madame Thevenet's daughter, Mademoiselle Claudine, lives in the worst of poverty at Paris. Madame herself has been brought here, under some spell, by a devil of a woman calling herself . . . Gentlemen, I implore you!"

"And I bet you," cried the little grimy man with the pistol, "you're sweet on this daughter what's-her-name?" He seemed delighted. "Ain't you, now?"

How, I ask of all Providence, could these people have surprised my secret? Yet I felt obliged to tell the truth.

"I will not conceal from you," I said, "that I have in truth a high regard for Mlle Claudine. But this lady, believe me, is engaged to a friend of mine, an officer of artillery."

"Then what do you *get* out of it? Eh?" asked the grimy little man, with another cunning look.

The question puzzled me. I could not reply. But the bartender with the gold teeth leaned over.

"If you want to see the old Frenchie alive, monseer," said he, "you'd better git." (*Sic*, Maurice.) "I hearn tell she had a stroke this morning."

But a dozen voices clamoured to keep me there, though this last intelligence sent me into despair. Then up rose the big and very old

man with the faded whiskers: indeed, I had never realised how old, because he seemed so hale.

"Which of you was with Washington?" said he, suddenly taking hold of the fierce little man's neckcloth, and speaking with contempt. "Make way for the nephew of Lafayette!"

They cheered me then, Maurice. They hurried me to the door, they begged me to return, they promised they would await me. One glance I sought—nor can I say why—for M. Thaddeus Perley. He was sitting at a table by a pillar, under an open gas-jet; his face whiter than ever, still wiping stains of tobacco-juice from his cloak.

Never have I seen a more mournful prospect than Thomas Street, when my cab set me down there. Perhaps it was my state of mind; for if Mme Thevenet had died without a sou left to her daughter: you conceive it?

The houses of Thomas Street were faced with dingy yellow brick, and a muddy sky hung over the chimney-pots. It had been warm all day, yet I found my spirit intolerably oppressed. Though heaven knows our Parisian streets are dirty enough, we do not allow pigs in them. Except for these, nothing moved in the forsaken street save a blind street-musician, with his dog and an instrument called a banjo; but even he was silent too.

For some minutes, it seemed to me, I plied the knocker at number 23, with hideous noise. Nothing stirred. Finally, one part of the door swung open a little, as for an eye. Whereupon I heard the shifting of a floor-bolt, and both doors were swung open.

Need I say that facing me stood the woman whom we have agreed to call Mademoiselle Jezebel?

She said to me: "And then, M. Armand?"

"Madame Thevenet!" cried I. "She is still alive?"

"She is alive," replied my companion, looking up at me from under the lids of her greenish eyes. "But she is completely paralysed."

I have never denied, Maurice, that Mlle Jezebel has a certain attractiveness. She is not old or even middle-aged. Were it not that her complexion is as muddy as was the sky above us then, she would have been pretty.

The Gentleman from Paris

"And as for Claudine," I said to her, "the daughter of madame——"

"You have come too late, M. Armand."

And well I remember that at this moment there rose up, in the mournful street outside, the tinkle of the banjo played by the street-musician. It moved closer, playing a popular catch whose words run something thus:

*Oh, I come from Alabama
With my banjo on my knee;
I depart for Louisiana
My Susannah for to see.*

Across the lips of mademoiselle flashed a smile of peculiar quality, like a razor-cut before the blood comes.

"Gold," she whispered. "Ninety thousand persons, one hears, have gone to seek it. Go to California, M. Armand. It is the only place you will find gold."

This tune, they say, is a merry tune. It did not seem so, as the dreary twanging faded away. Mlle Jezebel, with her muddy blond hair parted in the middle and drawn over her ears after the best fashion, faced me implacably. Her greenish eyes were wide open. Her old brown taffeta dress, full at the bust, narrow at the waist, rustled its wide skirts as she glided a step forward.

"Have the kindness," I said, "to stand aside. I wish to enter."

Hitherto in my life I had seen her docile and meek.

"You are no relative," she said. "I will not allow you to enter."

"In that case, I regret, I must."

"If you had ever spoken one kind word to *me*," whispered mademoiselle, looking up from under her eyelids, and with her breast heaving, "one gesture of love—that is to say, of affection—you might have shared five million francs."

"Stand aside, I say!"

"As it is, you prefer a doll-faced consumptive at Paris. So be it!"

I was raging, Maurice; I confess it; yet I drew myself up with coldness.

"You refer, perhaps, to Claudine Thevenet?"

"And to whom else?"

"I might remind you, mademoiselle, that the lady is pledged to my good friend Lieutenant Delage. I have forgotten her."

"Have you?" asked our Jezebel, with her eyes on my face and a strange hungry look in them. Mlle Jezebel added, with more pleasure:

"Well, she will die. Unless you can solve a mystery."

"A mystery?"

"I should not have said mystery, M. Armand. Because it is impossible of all solution. It is an Act of God!"

Up to this time the glass-fronted doors of the vestibule had stood open behind her, against a darkness of closed shutters in the house. There breathed out of it an odour of unswept carpets, a sourness of stale living. Someone was approaching, carrying a lighted candle.

"Who speaks," called a man's voice; shaky, but as French as Mlle Jezebel's. "Who speaks concerning an Act of God?"

I stepped across the threshold. Mademoiselle, who never left my side, immediately closed and locked the front doors. As the candle-glimmer moved still closer in gloom, I could have shouted for joy to see the man whom (as I correctly guessed) I had come to meet.

"You are M. Duroc, the lawyer!" I said. "You are my brother's friend!"

M. Duroc held the candle higher, to inspect me.

He was a big, heavy man who seemed to sag in all his flesh. In compensation for his bald head, the greyish-brown moustache flowed down and parted into two hairy fans of beard on either side of his chin. He looked at me through oval gold-rimmed spectacles; in a friendly way, but yet frightened. His voice was deep and gruff, clipping the syllables, despite his fright.

"And you——" *clip-clip*; the candle-holder trembled—"you are Armand de Lafayette. I had expected you by the steam-packet to-day. Well! You are here. On a fool's errand, I regret."

"But why?" (And I shouted it at him, Maurice.)

I looked at mademoiselle, who was faintly smiling.

"M. Duroc!" I protested. "You wrote to my brother. You said you had persuaded madame to repent of her harshness towards her daughter!"

The Gentleman from Paris

"Was that your duty?" asked the Jezebel, looking full at M. Duroc with her greenish eyes. "Was that your right?"

"I am a man of law," said M. Duroc. The deep monosyllables rapped, in ghostly bursts, through his parted beard. He was perspiring. "I am correct. Very correct! And yet——"

"Who nursed her?" asked the Jezebel. "Who soothed her, fed her, wore her filthy clothes, calmed her tempers, endured her interminable abuse? *I did!*"

And yet, all the time she was speaking, this woman kept sidling and sliding against me, brushing my side, as though she would make sure of my presence there.

"Well!" said the lawyer. "It matters little now! This mystery . . ."

You may well believe that all these cryptic remarks, as well as reference to a mystery or an Act of God, had driven me almost frantic. I demanded to know what he meant.

"Last night," said M. Duroc, "a certain article disappeared."

"Well, well?"

"It disappeared," said M. Duroc, drawn up like a grenadier. "But it could not conceivably have disappeared. I myself swear this! Our only suggestions as to how it might have disappeared are a toy rabbit and a barometer."

"Sir," I said, "I do not wish to be discourteous. But——"

"Am I mad, you ask?"

I bowed. If any man can manage at once to look sagging and uncertain, yet stately and dignified, M. Duroc managed it then. And dignity won, I think.

"Sir," he replied, gesturing with the candle towards the rear of the house, "Madame Thevenet lies there in her bed. She is paralysed. She can move only her eyes or partially the lips, without speech. Do you wish to see her?"

"If I am permitted."

"Yes. That would be correct. Accompany me."

And I saw the poor old woman, Maurice. Call her harridan if you like.

It was a square room of good size, whose shutters had remained closed and locked for years. Can one smell rust? In that room, with faded green wall-paper, I felt I could.

John Dickson Carr

One solitary candle did little more than dispel shadow. It burned atop the mantelpiece well opposite the foot of the bed; and a shaggy man, whom I afterwards learned to be a police-officer, sat in a green-upholstered arm-chair by an unlighted coal fireplace grate, picking his teeth with a knife.

"If you please, Dr. Harding!" M. Duroc called softly in English.

The long and lean American doctor, who had been bending over the bed so as to conceal from our sight the head and shoulders of Madame Thevenet, turned round. But his cadaverous body—in such fashion were madame's head and shoulders propped up against pillows—his cadaverous body, I say, still concealed her face.

"Has there been any change?" persisted M. Duroc in English.

"There has been no change," replied the dark-complexioned Dr. Harding, "except for the worse."

"Do you want her to be moved?"

"There has never been any necessity," said the physician, picking up his beaver hat from the bed. He spoke drily. "However, if you want to learn anything more about the toy rabbit or the barometer, I should hurry. The lady will die in a matter of hours, probably less."

And he stood to one side.

It was a heavy bed with four posts and a canopy. The bed-curtains, of some dullish-green material, were closely drawn on every side except the long side by which we saw Madame Thevenet in profile. Lean as a post, rigid, the strings of her cotton nightcap tightly tied under her chin, Madame Thevenet lay propped up there. But one eye rolled towards us, and it rolled horribly.

Up to this time the woman we call the Jezebel had said little. She chose this moment again to come brushing against my side. Her greenish eyes, lids half-closed, shone in the light of M. Duroc's candle. What she whispered was: "You don't really hate me, do you?"

Maurice, I make a pause here.

Since I wrote the sentence, I put down my pen, and pressed my hands over my eyes, and once more I thought. But let me try again.

The Gentleman from Paris

I spent just two hours in the bedroom of Madame Thevenet. At the end of the time—oh, you shall hear why!—I rushed out of that bedroom, and out of number 23 Thomas Street, like the maniac I was.

The streets were full of people, of carriages, of omnibuses, at early evening. Knowing no place of refuge save the saloon from which I had come, I gave its address to a cab-driver. Since still I had swallowed no food, I may have been light-headed. Yet I wished to pour out my heart to the friends who had bidden me return there. And where were they now?

A new group, all new, lounged against the bar-counter under brighter gaslight and brighter paint. Of all those who smote me on the back and cheered, none remained save the ancient giant who had implied friendship with General Washington. *He*, alas, lay helplessly drunk with his head near a sawdust spitting-box. Nevertheless I was so moved that I took the liberty of thrusting a handful of bank-notes into his pocket. He alone remained.

Wait, there was another!

I do not believe he had remained there because of me. Yet M. Thaddeus Perley, still sitting alone at the little table by the pillar, with the open gas-jet above, stared vacantly at the empty glass in his hand.

He had named himself a foreigner; he was probably French. That was as well. For, as I lurched against the table, I was befuddled and all English had fled my wits.

"Sir," said I, "will you permit a madman to share your table?"

M. Perley gave a great start, as though roused out of thought. He was now sober: this I saw. Indeed, his shiver and haggard face were due to lack of stimulant rather than too much of it.

"Sir," he stammered, getting to his feet, "I shall be—I shall be honoured by your company." Automatically he opened his mouth to call for a waiter; his hand went to his pocket; he stopped.

"No, no, no!" said I. "If you insist, M. Perley, you may pay for the second bottle. The first is mine. I am sick at heart, and I would speak with a gentleman."

At these last words M. Perley's whole expression changed. He sat

down, and gave me a grave courtly nod. His eyes, which were his most expressive feature, studied my face and my disarray.

"You are ill, M. de Lafayette," he said. "Have you so soon come to grief in this—this *civilized* country?"

"I have come to grief, yes. But not through civilization or the lack of it." And I banged my fist on the table. "I have come to grief, M. Perley, through miracles or magic. I have come to grief with a problem which no man's ingenuity can solve!"

M. Perley looked at me in a strange way. But someone had brought a bottle of brandy, with its accessories. M. Perley's trembling hand slopped a generous allowance into my glass, and an even more generous one into his own.

"That is very curious," he remarked, eyeing the glass. "A murder, was it?"

"No. But a valuable document has disappeared. The most thorough search by the police cannot find it."

Touch him anywhere, and he flinched. M. Perley, for some extraordinary reason, appeared to think I was mocking him.

"A document, you say?" His laugh was a trifle unearthly. "Come, now. Was it by any chance—a letter?"

"No, no! It was a will. Three large sheets of parchment, of the size you call foolscap. Listen!"

And as M. Perley added water to his brandy and gulped down about a third of it, I leaned across the table.

"Madame Thevenet, of whom you may have heard me speak in this café, was an invalid. But (until the early hours of this morning) she was not bedridden. She could move, and walk about her room, and so on. She had been lured away from Paris and her family by a green-eyed woman named the Jezebel.

"But a kindly lawyer of this city, M. Duroc, believed that madame suffered and had a bad conscience about her own daughter. Last night, despite the Jezebel, he persuaded madame at last to sign a will leaving all her money to this daughter.

"And the daughter, Claudine, is in mortal need of it! From my brother and myself, who have more than enough, she will not accept a sou. Her affianced, Lieutenant Delage, is as poor as she. But,

unless she leaves France for Switzerland, she will die. I will not conceal from you that Claudine suffers from that dread disease we politely call consumption."

M. Perley stopped with his glass again half-way to his mouth.

He believed me now; I sensed it. Yet under the dark hair, tumbled on his forehead, his face had gone as white as his neat, mended shirt-frill.

"So very little a thing is money!" he whispered. "So very little a thing!"

And he lifted the glass and drained it.

"You do not think I am mocking you, sir?"

"No, no!" says M. Perley, shading his eyes with one hand. "I knew myself of one such case. She is dead. Pray continue."

"Last night, I repeat, Madame Thevenet changed her mind. When M. Duroc paid his weekly evening visit with the news that I should arrive to-day, madame fairly chattered with eagerness and a kind of terror. Death was approaching, she said; she had a presentiment."

As I spoke, Maurice, there returned to me the image of that shadowy, arsenic-green bedroom in the shuttered house; and what M. Duroc had told me.

"Madame," I continued, "cried out to M. Duroc that he must bolt the bedroom door. She feared the Jezebel, who lurked but said nothing. M. Duroc drew up to her bedside a portable writing-desk, with two good candles. For a long time madame spoke, pouring out contrition, self-abasement, the story of an unhappy marriage, all of which M. Duroc (sweating with embarrassment) was obliged to write down until it covered three large parchment sheets.

"But it was done, M. Perley!

"The will, in effect, left everything to her daughter, Claudine. It revoked a previous will by which all had been left (and this can be done in French law, as we both know) to Jezebel of the muddy complexion and the muddy yellow hair.

"Well, then! . . .

"M. Duroc sallies out into the street, where he finds two sober fellows who come in. Madame signs the will, M. Duroc sands it, and the two men from the street affix their signatures as witnesses. Then

they are gone. M. Duroc folds the will lengthways, and prepares to put it into his carpet-bag. Now, M. Perley, mark what follows!

“‘No, no, no!’ cries madame, with the shadow of her peaked night-cap wagging on the locked shutters beyond. ‘I wish to keep it—for this one night!’

“‘For this one night, madame?’ asks M. Duroc.

“‘I wish to press it against my heart,’ says Madame Thevenet, ‘I wish to read it once, twice, a thousand times! M. Duroc, what time is it?’

“Whereupon he takes out his gold repeater, and opens it. To his astonishment it is one o’clock in the morning. Yet he touches the spring of the repeater, and its pulse-beat rings one.

“‘M. Duroc,’ pleads Madame Thevenet, ‘remain here with me for the rest of the night!’

“‘Madame!’ cries M. Duroc, shocked to the very fans of his beard. ‘That would not be correct.’

“‘Yes, you are right,’ says madame. And never, swears the lawyer, has he seen her less bleary of eye, more alive with wit and cunning, more the great lady of ruin, than there in that green and shadowy and foul-smelling room.

“Yet this very fact puts her in more and more terror of the Jezebel, who is never seen. She points to M. Duroc’s carpet-bag.

“‘I think you have much work to do, dear sir?’

“M. Duroc groaned. ‘The Good Lord knows that I have!’

“‘Outside the only door of this room,’ says madame, ‘there is a small dressing-room. Set up your writing-desk beside the door there, so that no one may enter without your knowledge. Do your work there; you shall have a lamp or many candles. Do it,’ shrieks madame, ‘for the sake of Claudine and for the sake of an old friendship!’

“Very naturally, M. Duroc hesitated.

“‘She will be hovering,’ pleads Madame Thevenet, pressing the will against her breast. ‘*This* I shall read and read and read, and sanctify with my tears. If I find I am falling asleep,’ and here the old lady looked cunning, ‘I shall hide it. But no matter! Even *she* cannot penetrate through locked shutters and a guarded door.’

“Well, in fine, the lawyer at length yielded.

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"He set up his writing-desk against the very doorpost outside that door. When he last saw madame, before closing the door, he saw her in profile with the green bed-curtains drawn except on that side, propped up with a tall candle burning on a table at her right hand.

"Ah, that night! I think I see M. Duroc at his writing-desk, as he has told me, in an airless dressing-room where no clock ticked. I see him, at times, removing his oval spectacles to press his smarting eyes. I see him returning to his legal papers, while his pen scratched through the wicked hours of the night.

"He heard nothing, or virtually nothing, until five o'clock in the morning. Then, which turned him cold and flabby, he heard a cry which he describes as being like that of a deaf-mute.

"The communicating door had not been bolted on Madame Thevenet's side, in case she needed help. M. Duroc rushed into the other room.

"On the table, at madame's right hand, the tall candle had burnt down to a flattish mass of wax over which still hovered a faint bluish flame. Madame herself lay rigid in her peaked nightcap. That revival of spirit last night, or remorse in her bitter heart, had brought on the last paralysis. Though M. Duroc tried to question her, she could move only her eyes.

"Then M. Duroc noticed that the will, which she had clutched as a doomed religious might clutch a crucifix, was not in her hand or on the bed.

"'Where is the will?' he shouted at her, as though she were deaf too. 'Where is the will?'

"Madame Thevenet's eyes fixed on him. Then they moved down, and looked steadily at a trumpery toy—a rabbit, perhaps four inches high, made of pink velours or the like—which lay on the bed. Again she looked at M. Duroc, as though to emphasize this. Then her eyes rolled, this time with dreadful effort, towards a large barometer, shaped like a warming-pan, which hung on the wall beside the door. Three times she did this before the bluish candle-flame flickered and went out."

And I, Armand de Lafayette, paused here in my recital to M. Perley.

Again I became aware that I was seated in a garish saloon, swilling brandy, amid loud talk that beat the air. There was a thumping noise from the theatre above our heads, and faint strains of music.

"The will," I said, "was not stolen. Not even the Jezebel could have melted through locked shutters or a guarded door. The will was not hidden, because no inch of the room remains unsearched. *Yet the will is gone!*"

I threw a glance across the table at M. Perley.

To me, I am sure, the brandy had given strength and steadied my nerves. With M. Perley I was not so sure. He was a little flushed. That slightly wild look, which I had observed before, had crept up especially into one eye, giving his whole face a somewhat lopsided appearance. Yet all his self-confidence had returned. He gave me a little crooked smile.

I struck the table.

"Do you honour me with your attention, M. Perley?"

"What song the Sirens sang," he said to me, "or what names Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond *all* conjecture."

"They are beyond *my* conjecture!" I cried. "And so is this!"

M. Perley extended his hand, spread the fingers, and examined them as one who owns the universe.

"It is some little time," he remarked, "since I have concerned myself with these trifles." His eyes retreated into a dream. "Yet I have given some trifling aid, in the past, to the Prefect of the Parisian police."

"You are a Frenchman! I knew it! And the police?" Seeing his lofty look, I added: "As an amateur, understood?"

"Understood!" Then his delicate hand—it would be unjust to call it claw-like—shot across the table and fastened on my arm. The strange eyes burned towards my face. "A little more detail!" he pleaded humbly. "A little more, I beg of you! This woman, for instance, you call the Jezebel?"

"It was she who met me at the house."

"And then?"

I described for him my meeting with the Jezebel, with M. Duroc, and our entrance to the sick-room, where the shaggy police-officer sat in the arm-chair and the saturnine doctor faced us from beside the bed.

"This woman," I exclaimed, with the room vividly before my eyes as I described it, "seems to have conceived for me (forgive me) a kind of passion. No doubt it was due to some idle compliments I once paid her at Paris.

"As I have explained, the Jezebel is *not* unattractive, even if she would only (again forgive me) wash her hair. Nevertheless, when once more she brushed my side and whispered, 'You don't really hate me, do you?' I felt little less than horror. It seemed to me that in some fashion I was responsible for the whole tragedy.

"While we stood beside the bed, M. Duroc the lawyer poured out the story I have recounted. There lay the poor paralytic, and confirmed it with her eyes. The toy rabbit, a detestable pink colour, lay in its same position on the bed. Behind me, hung against the wall by the door, was the large barometer.

"Apparently for my benefit, Madame Thevenet again went through her dumb-show with imploring eyes. She would look at the rabbit; next (as M. Duroc had not mentioned), she would roll her eyes all around her, for some desperate yet impenetrable reason, before fixing her gaze on the barometer.

"It meant . . . what?

"The lawyer spoke then. 'More light!' gulped out M. Duroc. 'If you must have closed shutters and windows, then let us at least have more light!'

"The Jezebel glided out to fetch candles. During M. Duroc's explanation he had several times mentioned my name. At first mention of it the shaggy police-officer jumped and put away his clasp-knife. He beckoned to the physician, Dr. Harding, who went over for a whispered conference.

"Whereupon the police-officer sprang up.

" 'Mr. Lafayette!' And he swung my hand pompously. 'If I'd known it was you, Mr. Lafayette, I wouldn't 'a' sat there like a bump on a log.'

"‘You are an officer of police, sir,’ said I. ‘Can you think of no explanation?’

"He shook his head.

"‘These people are Frenchies, Mr. Lafayette, and you’re an American,’ he said, with somewhat conspicuous lack of logic. ‘If they’re telling the truth——’

"‘Let us assume that!’

"‘I can’t tell you where the old lady’s will is,’ he stated positively. ‘But I can tell you where it ain’t. It ain’t hidden in this room!’

"‘But surely . . . !’ I began in despair.

"At this moment the Jezebel, her brown taffeta dress rustling, glided back into the room with a handful of candles and a tin box of the new-style Lucifer matches. She lighted several candles, sticking them on any surface in their own grease.

"There were one or two fine pieces of furniture; but the mottled-marble tops were chipped and stained, the gilt sides cracked. There were a few mirrors, creating mimic spectral life. I saw a little more clearly the faded green paper of the walls, and what I perceived to be the partly open door of a cupboard. The floor was of bare boards.

"All this while I was conscious of two pairs of eyes: the imploring gaze of Madame Thevenet, and the amorous gaze of the Jezebel. One or the other I could have endured, but both together seemed to suffocate me.

"‘Mr. Duroc here,’ said the shaggy police-officer, clapping the distressed advocate on the shoulder, ‘sent a messenger in a cab at half-past five this morning. And what time did we get here? I ask you and I tell you! Six o’clock!’

"Then he shook his finger at me, in a kind of pride and fury of efficiency.

"‘Why, Mr. Lafayette, there’s been fourteen men at this room from six this morning until just before you got here!’

"‘To search for Madame Thevenet’s will, you mean?’

"The shaggy man nodded portentously, and folded his arms.

"‘Floor’s solid.’ He stamped on the bare boards. ‘Walls and ceiling? Nary a inch missed. We reckon we’re remarkable smart; and we are.’

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“ ‘But Madame Thevenet,’ I persisted, ‘was not a complete invalid until this morning. She could move about. If she became afraid of’—the name of the Jezebel choked me—‘if she became afraid, and *did* hide the will . . .’

“ ‘Where’d she hide it? Tell me!’

“ ‘In the furniture, then?’

“ ‘Cabinet-makers in, Mr. Lafayette. No secret compartments.’

“ ‘In one of the mirrors?’

“ ‘Took the backs of ’em off. No will hid there.’

“ ‘Up the chimney!’ I cried.

“ ‘Sent a chimney-sweep up there,’ replied my companion in a ruminating way. Each time I guessed, he would leer at me in friendly and complacent challenge. ‘Ye-es I reckon we’re pretty smart. But we didn’t find no will.’

“ ‘The pink rabbit also seemed to leer from the bed. I saw madame’s eyes. Once again, as a desperate mind will fasten on trifles, I observed the strings of the nightcap beneath her scrawny chin. But I looked again at the toy rabbit.

“ ‘Has it occurred to you,’ I said triumphantly, ‘to examine the bed and bedstead of Madame Thevenet herself?’

“ ‘My shaggy friend went to her bedside.

“ ‘Poor old woman,’ he said. He spoke as though she were already a corpse. Then he turned round. ‘We lifted her out, just as gentle as a newborn babe (didn’t we, ma’am?). No hollow bedposts! Nothing in the canopy! Nothing in the frame or the feather-beds or the curtains or the bedclothes!’

“ ‘Suddenly the shaggy police-officer became angry, as though he wished to be rid of the whole matter.

“ ‘And it ain’t in the toy rabbit,’ he said, ‘because you can see we slit it up, if you look close. And it ain’t in that barometer there. It just—ain’t here.’

“ ‘There was a silence as heavy as the dusty, hot air of this room.

“ ‘It is here,’ murmured M. Duroc in his gruff voice. ‘It must be here!’

“ ‘The Jezebel stood there meekly, with downcast eyes.

“ ‘And I, in my turn, confess that *I* lost my head. I stalked over to

the barometer, and tapped it. Its needle, which already indicated, 'Rain; cold,' moved still further towards that point.

"I was not insane enough to hit it with my fist. But I crawled on the floor, in search of a secret hiding-place. I felt along the wall. The police-officer—who kept repeating that nobody must touch anything and he would take no responsibility until he went off duty at something o'clock—the police-officer I ignored.

"What at length gave me pause was the cupboard, already thoroughly searched. In the cupboard hung a few withered dresses and gowns, as though they had shrivelled with Madame Thevenet's body. But on the shelf of the cupboard . . .

"On the shelf stood a great number of perfume-bottles: even to-day, I fear, many of our countrymen think perfume a substitute for water and soap; and the state of madame's hands would have confirmed this. *But*, on the shelf, were a few dusty novels. There was a crumpled and begrimed copy of yesterday's *New-York Sun*. This newspaper did not contain a will; but it did contain a black beetle, which ran out across my hand.

"In a disgust past describing, I flung down the beetle and stamped on it. I closed the cupboard door, acknowledging defeat. Madame Thevenet's will was gone. And at the same second, in that dim green room—still badly lighted, with only a few more candles—two voices cried out.

"One was my own voice:

"*'In God's name, where is it?'*

"The other was the deep voice of M. Duroc:

"*'Look at that woman! She knows!'*

"And he meant the Jezebel.

"M. Duroc, with his beard-fans a-tremble, was pointing to a mirror; a little blurred, as these mirrors were. Our Jezebel had been looking into the mirror, her back turned to us. Now she dodged, as at a stone thrown.

"With good poise our Jezebel writhed this movement into a curtsy, turning to face us. But not before I also had seen that smile—like a razor-cut before the blood comes—as well as full knowledge, mocking knowledge, shining out of wide-open eyes in the mirror.

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" 'You spoke to me, M. Duroc?' She murmured the reply, also in French.

" 'Listen to me!' the lawyer said formally. 'This will is *not* missing. It is in this room. You were not here last night. Something has made you guess. You know where it is.'

" 'Are you unable to find it?' asked the Jezebel in surprise.

" 'Stand back, young man!' M. Duroc said to me. 'I ask you something, mademoiselle, in the name of justice.'

" 'Ask!' said the Jezebel.

" 'If Claudine Thevenet inherits the money to which she is entitled, you will be well paid; yes, overpaid! You know Claudine. You know that!'

" 'I know it.'

" 'But if the new will be *not* found,' said M. Duroc, again, waving me back, 'then you inherit everything. And Claudine will die. For it will be assumed——'

" 'Yes!' said the Jezebel, with one hand pressed against her breast. 'You yourself, M. Duroc, testify that all night a candle was burning at madame's bedside. Well! The poor woman, whom *I* loved and cherished, repented of her ingratitude towards me. She burnt this new will at the candle-flame; she crushed its ashes to powder and blew them away!'

" 'Is that true?' cried M. Duroc.

" 'They will assume it,' smiled the Jezebel, 'as you say.' She looked at me. 'And for you, M. Armand!'

" 'She glided closer. I can say that I saw her eyes uncovered; or, if you wish to put it so, her soul and flesh together.

" 'I would give you everything on earth,' she said. 'I will not give you the doll-face in Paris.'

" 'Listen to me!' I said to her, so agitated that I seized her shoulders. 'You are out of your senses! You cannot give Claudine to me! She will marry another man!'

" 'And do you think that matters to me,' asked the Jezebel, with her green eyes full on mine, 'as long as you still love her?'

" 'There was a small crash as someone dropped a knife on the floor.

" 'We three, I think, had completely forgotten that we were not

alone. There were two spectators, although they did not comprehend our speech.

"The saturnine Dr. Harding now occupied the green armchair. His long thin legs, in tight black trousers with strap under the boot-instep, were crossed and looked spidery; his high beaver hat glimmered on his head. The police-officer, who was picking his teeth with a knife when I first saw him, had now dropped the knife when he tried to trim his nails.

"But both men sensed the atmosphere. Both were alert, feeling out with the tentacles of their nerves. The police-officer shouted at me.

" 'What's this gabble?' he said. 'What's a-gitting into your head?'

"Grotesquely, it was that word 'head' which gave me my inspiration.

" 'The nightcap!' I exclaimed in English.

" 'What nightcap?'

"For the nightcap of Madame Thevenet had a peak; it was large; it was tightly tied under the chin; it might well conceal a flat-pressed document which—but you understand. The police-officer, dull-witted as he appeared, grasped the meaning in a flash. And how I wished I had never spoken! For the fellow meant well, but he was not gentle.

"As I raced round the curtained sides of the bed, the police-officer was holding a candle in one hand and tearing off madame's nightcap with the other. He found no will there, no document at all; only straggly wisps of hair on a skull grown old before its time.

"Madame Thevenet had been a great lady, once. It must have been the last humiliation. Two tears overflowed her eyes and ran down her cheeks. She lay propped up there in a nearly sitting position; but something seemed to wrench inside her.

"And she closed her eyes for ever. And the Jezebel laughed.

"That is the end of my story. That is why I rushed out of the house like a madman. The will has vanished as though by magic; or is it still there by magic? In any case, you find me at this table: grubby and dishevelled and much ashamed."

For a little time after I had finished my narrative to M. Perley in

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the saloon, it seemed to me that the bar-counter was a trifle quieter. But a faint stamping continued from the theatre above our heads. Then all was hushed, until a chorus rose to a tinkle of many banjos.

*Oh, I come from Alabama
With my banjo on my knee;
I depart for Louisiana . . .*

Enough! The song soon died away, and M. Thaddeus Perley did not even hear it.

M. Perley sat looking downwards into an empty glass, so that I could not see his face.

"Sir," he remarked almost bitterly, "you are a man of good heart. I am glad to be of service in a problem so trifling as this."

"Trifling!"

His voice was a little husky, but not slurred. His hand slowly turned the glass round and round.

"Will you permit two questions?" asked M. Perley.

"Two questions? Ten thousand!"

"More than two will be unnecessary." Still M. Perley did not look up. "This toy rabbit, of which so much was made: I would know its exact position on the bed?"

"It was almost at the foot of the bed, and about the middle in a crossways direction."

"Ah, so I had imagined. Were the three sheets of parchment, forming the will, written upon two sides or upon only one?"

"I had not told you, M. Perley. But M. Duroc said: upon one side only."

M. Perley raised his head.

His face was now flushed and distorted with drink, his eyes grown wild. In his cups he was as proud as Satan, and as disdainful of others' intelligence; yet he spoke with dignity, and with careful clearness.

"It is ironic, M. de Lafayette, that I should tell you how to lay your hand on the missing will and the elusive money; since, upon my word, I have never been able to perform a like service for myself."

And he smiled, as at some secret joke. "Perhaps," he added, "it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault."

I could only look at him in bewilderment.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain! A little *too* self-evident!"

"You mock me, sir! I will not . . ."

"Take me as I am," said M. Perley, whacking the foot of the glass on the table, "or leave me. Besides——" here his wandering eye encountered a list of steam-sailings pasted against the wall—"I—— I leave to-morrow by the *Parnassus* for England, and then for France."

"I meant no offence, M. Perley! If you have knowledge, speak!"

"Madame Thevenet," he said, carefully pouring himself more brandy, "hid the will in the middle of the night. Does it puzzle you that she took such precautions to hide the will? But the element of the *outré* must always betray itself. The Jezebel *must not* find that will! Yet Madame Thevenet trusted nobody—not even the worthy physician who attended her. If Madame were to die of a stroke, the police would be there and must soon, she was sure, discover her simple device. Even if she were paralysed, it would ensure the presence of other persons in the room to act as unwitting guards.

"Your cardinal error," M. Perley continued dispassionately, "was one of ratiocination. You tell me that Madame Thevenet, to give you a hint, looked fixedly at some point near the foot of the bed. Why do you assume that she was looking at the toy rabbit?"

"Because," I replied hotly, "the toy rabbit was the only object she could have looked at!"

"Pardon me; but it was *not*. You several times informed me that the bed-curtains were closely drawn together on three sides. They were drawn on all but the 'long' side towards the door. Therefore the ideal reasoner, without having seen the room, may safely say that the curtains were drawn together at the foot of the bed?"

"Yes, true!"

"After looking fixedly at this point represented by the toy, Madame Thevenet then 'rolls her eyes all round her'—in your phrase. May we assume that she wishes the curtains to be drawn back, so that she may see something *beyond* the bed?"

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"It is—possible, yes!"

"It is more than possible, as I shall demonstrate. Let us direct our attention, briefly, to the incongruous phenomenon of the barometer on another wall. The barometer indicates, 'Rain; cold.' "

Here M. Perley's thin shoulders drew together under the old military cloak.

"Well," he said, "the cold is on its way. Yet this day, for April, has been warm outside and indoors, oppressively hot?"

"Yes! Of course!"

"You yourself," continued M. Perley, inspecting his finger-nails, "told me what was directly opposite the foot of the bed. Let us suppose that the bed-curtains are drawn open. Madame Thevenet, in her nearly seated position, is looking *downwards*. What would she have seen?"

"The fireplace!" I cried. "The grate of the fireplace!"

"Already we have a link with the weather. And what, as you have specifically informed me, was in the grate of the fireplace?"

"An unlighted coal fire!"

"Exactly. And what is essential for the composition of such a fire? We need coal; we need wood; but primarily and above all, we need . . ."

"*Paper!*" I cried.

"In the cupboard of that room," said M. Perley, with his disdainful little smile, "was a very crumpled and begrimed (mark that; not dusty) copy of *yesterday's* New-York *Sun*. To light fires is the most common, and indeed the best, use for our daily press. That copy had been used to build yesterday's fire. But something else, during the night, was substituted for it. You yourself remarked the extraordinarily dirty state of Madame Thevenet's hands."

M. Perley swallowed the brandy, and his flush deepened.

"Sir," he said loudly, "you will find the will crumpled up, with ends most obviously protruding, under the coal and wood in the fireplace grate. Even had anyone taken the fire to pieces, he would have found only what appeared to be dirty blank paper, written side undermost, which could never be a valuable will. It was too self-evident to be seen. Now go!"

"Go?" I echoed stupidly.

M. Perley rose from his chair.

"Go, I say!" he shouted, with an even wilder eye. "The Jezebel could not light that fire. It was too warm, for one thing; and all day there were police-officers with instructions that an outsider must touch nothing. But now? *Madame Thevenet kept warning you that the fire must not be lighted, or the will would be destroyed!*"

"Will you await me here?" I called over my shoulder.

"Yes, yes! And perhaps there will be peace for the wretched girl with—with the lung trouble."

Even as I ran out of the door I saw him, grotesque and pitiful, slump across the table. Hope, rising and surging, seemed to sweep me along like the crack of the cabman's whip. But when I reached my destination, hope receded.

The shaggy police-officer was just descending the front steps.

"None of us coming back here, Mr. Lafayette!" he called cheerily. "Old Mrs. What's-her-name went and burnt that will at a candle last night.—Here, what's o'clock?"

The front door was unlocked. I raced through that dark house, and burst into the rear bedroom.

The corpse still lay in the big, gloomy bed. Every candle had flickered almost down to its socket. The police-officer's clasp-knife, forgotten since he had dropped it, still lay on bare boards. But the Jezebel was there.

She knelt on the hearth, with the tin box of Lucifer matches she had brought there earlier. The match spurted, a bluish fire; I saw her eagerness; she held the match to the grate.

"A Lucifer," I said, "in the hand of a Jezebel!"

And I struck her away from the grate, so that she reeled against a chair and fell. Large coals, small coals rattled down in puffs of dust as I plunged my hands into the unlighted fire. Little sticks, sawed sticks; and I found it there: crumpled parchment-sheets, but incontestably madame's will.

"M. Duroc!" I called. "M. Duroc!"

You and I, my brother Maurice, have fought the Citizen-King with bayonets as we now fight the upstart Bonapartist; we need not

be ashamed of tears. I confess, then, that the tears overran my eyes and blinded me. I scarcely saw M. Duroc as he hurried into the room.

Certainly I did not see the Jezebel stealthily pick up the police-officer's knife. I noticed nothing at all until she flew at me, and stabbed me in the back.

Peace, my brother: I have assured you all is well. At that time, faith, I was not much conscious of any hurt. I bade M. Duroc, who was trembling, wrench out the knife; I borrowed his roomy great-coat to hide the blood; I must hurry, hurry, hurry back to that little table under the gas-jet.

I planned it all on my way back. M. Perley, apparently a stranger in this country, disliked it and was evidently very poor even in France. But *we* are not precisely paupers. Even with his intense pride, he could not refuse (for such a service) a sum which would comfort him for the rest of his life.

Back I plunged into the saloon, and hurried down it. Then I stopped. The little round table by the pillar, under the flaring gas-jet, was empty.

How long I stood there I cannot tell. The back of my shirt, which at first had seemed full of blood, now stuck to the borrowed great-coat. All of a sudden I caught sight of the fat-faced bar-tender with the gold teeth, who had been on service that afternoon and had returned now. As a mark of respect, he came out from behind the bar-counter to greet me.

"Where is the gentleman who was sitting at that table?"

I pointed to it. My voice, in truth, must have sounded so hoarse and strange that he mistook it for anger.

"Don't you worry about that, monseer!" said he reassuringly. "*That's* been tended to! We threw the drunken tramp out of here!"

"You threw . . ."

"Right bang in the gutter. Had to crawl along it before he could stand up." My bartender's face was pleased and vicious. "Ordered a bottle of best brandy, and couldn't pay for it." The face changed again. "Goddelmighty, monseer, what's wrong?"

"I ordered that brandy."

"He didn't say so, when the waiter brought me over. Just looked me up and down, crazy-like, and said a gentleman would give his I.O.U. Gentleman!"

"M. Perley," I said, restraining an impulse to kill that bartender, "is a friend of mine. He departs for France early tomorrow morning. Where is his hotel? Where can I find him?"

"Perley!" sneered my companion. "That ain't even his real name, I hearn tell. Gits high-and-mighty ideas from upper Broadway. But his real name's on the I.O.U."

A surge of hope, once more, almost blinded me. "Did you keep that I.O.U.?"

"Yes, I kepp it," growled the bartender, fishing in his pocket. "God knows why, but I kepp it."

And at last, Maurice, I triumphed!

True, I collapsed from my wound; and the fever would not let me remember that I must be at the dock when the *Parnassus* steam-packet departed from New-York next morning. I must remain here, shut up in a hotel-room and unable to sleep at night, until I can take ship for home. But where I failed, you can succeed. He was to leave on the morrow by the *Parnassus* for England, and then for France—so he told me. You can find him—in six months at the most. In six months, I give you my word he will be out of misery for ever!

"I.O.U.," reads the little slip, "*for one bottle of your best brandy, forty-five cents. Signed: Edgar A. Poe.*"

I remain, Maurice,
Your affectionate brother,
Armand

The Rubber Trumpet

ROY VICKERS

If you were to enquire at Scotland Yard for the Department of Dead Ends you might be told, in all sincerity, that there is no such thing, because it is not called by that name nowadays. All the same, if it has no longer a room to itself, you may rest assured that its spirit hovers over the index files of which we are all so justly proud.

The Department came into existence in the spacious days of King Edward VII and it took everything that the other departments rejected. For instance, it noted and filed all those clues that had the exasperating effect of proving a palpably guilty man innocent. Its shelves were crowded with exhibits that might have been in the Black Museum—but were not. Its photographs were a perpetual irritation to all rising young detectives, who felt that they ought to have found the means of putting them in the Rogues' Gallery.

To the Department, too, were taken all those members of the public who insist on helping the police with obviously irrelevant information and preposterous theories. The one passport to the Department was a written statement by the senior officer in charge of the case that the information offered was absurd.

Judged by the standards of reason and common sense, its files were mines of misinformation. It proceeded largely by guesswork. On one occasion it hanged a murderer by accidentally punning on his name.

It was the function of the Department to connect persons and things that had no logical connection. In short, it stood for the anti-thesis of scientific detection. It played always for a lucky fluke—to offset the lucky fluke by which the criminal so often eludes the police.

Often it muddled one crime with another and arrived at the correct answer by wrong reasoning.

As in the case of George Muncey and the rubber trumpet.

And note, please, that the rubber trumpet had nothing logically to do with George Muncey, nor the woman he murdered, nor the circumstances in which he murdered her.

2

Until the age of twenty-six George Muncey lived with his widowed mother in Chichester, the family income being derived from a chemist's shop, efficiently controlled by Mrs. Muncey with the aid of a manager and two assistants, of whom latterly George was one. Of his early youth we know only that he won a scholarship at a day-school, tenable for three years, which was cancelled at the end of a year, though not, apparently, for misconduct. He failed several times to obtain his pharmaceutical certificate, with the result that he was eventually put in charge of the fancy soaps, the hot-water bottles and the photographic accessories.

For this work he received two pounds per week. Every Saturday he handed the whole of it to his mother, who returned him fifteen shillings for pocket money. She had no need of the balance and only took it in order to nourish his self-respect. He did not notice that she bought his clothes and met all his other expenses.

George had no friends and very little of what an ordinary young man would regard as pleasure. He spent nearly all his spare time with his mother, to whom he was devoted. She was an amiable but very domineering woman and she does not seem to have noticed that her son's affection had in it a quality of childishness—that he liked her to form his opinions for him and curtail his liberties.

After his mother's death he did not resume his duties at the shop. For some eight months he mooned about Chichester. Then, the business having been sold and probate granted, he found himself in possession of some eight hundred pounds, with another two thousand pounds due to him in three months. He did not, apparently, understand this part of the transaction—for he made no application for

The Rubber Trumpet

the two thousand, and as the solicitors could not find him until his name came into the papers, the two thousand remained intact for his defence.

That he was a normal but rather backward young man is proved by the fact that the walls of his bedroom were liberally decorated with photographs of the actresses of the moment and pictures of anonymous beauties cut from the more sporting weeklies. Somewhat naively he bestowed this picture gallery as a parting gift on the elderly cook.

He drew the whole of the eight hundred pounds in notes and gold, said good-bye to his home and went up to London. He stumbled on cheap and respectable lodgings in Pimlico. Then, in a gauche, small-town way, he set out to see life.

It was the year when *The Merry Widow* was setting all London a-whistling. Probably on some chance recommendation, he drifted to Daly's Theatre, where he bought himself a seat in the dress-circle.

It was the beginning of the London season and we may assume that he would have felt extremely self-conscious sitting in the circle in his ready-made lounge suit, had there not happened to be a woman also in morning dress next to him.

The woman was a Miss Hilda Callermere. She was forty-three and if she escaped positive ugliness she was certainly without any kind of physical attractiveness, though she was neat in her person and reasonably well-dressed, in an old-fashioned way.

Eventually to the Department of Dead Ends came the whole story of his strange courtship.

There is a curious quality in the manner in which these two slightly unusual human beings approached one another. They did not speak until after the show, when they were wedged together in the corridor. Their voices seem to come to us out of a fog of social shyness and vulgar gentility. And it was she who took the initiative.

"If you'll excuse me speaking to you without an introduction, we seem to be rather out of it, you and I, what with one thing and another."

His reply strikes us now as somewhat unusual.

"Yes, rather!" he said. "Are you coming here again?"

"Yes, rather! I sometimes come twice a week."

During the next fortnight they both went three times to *The Merry Widow*, but on the first two of these occasions they missed each other. On the third occasion, which was a Saturday night, Miss Callermere invited George Muncey to walk with her on the following morning in Battersea Park.

Here shyness dropped from them. They slipped quite suddenly on to an easy footing of friendship. George Muncey accepted her invitation to lunch. She took him to a comfortably furnished eight-roomed house—her own—in which she lived with an aunt whom she supported. For, in addition to the house, Miss Callermere owned an income of six hundred pounds derived from gilt-edged investments.

But these considerations weighed hardly at all with George Muncey—for he had not yet spent fifty pounds of his eight hundred, and at this stage he had certainly no thought of marriage with Miss Callermere.

3

Neither of them had any occupation, so they could meet whenever they chose. Miss Callermere undertook to show George London. Her father had been a cheery, beery jerry-builder with sporting interests and she had reacted from him into a parched severity of mind. She marched George round the Tower of London, the British Museum and the like, reading aloud extracts from a guide-book. They went neither to the theatres nor to the music-halls, for Miss Callermere thought these frivolous and empty-headed—with the exception of *The Merry Widow*, which she believed to be opera, and therefore cultural. And the extraordinary thing was that George Muncey liked it all.

There can be no doubt that this smug little spinster, some sixteen years older than himself, touched a chord of sympathy in his nature. But she was wholly unable to cater for that part of him that had plastered photographs of public beauties on the walls of his bedroom.

She never went to *The Merry Widow* again, but once or twice he would sneak off to Daly's by himself. *The Merry Widow*, in fact,

provided him with a dream-life. We may infer that in his imagination he identified himself with Mr. Joseph Coyne, who nightly, in the character of Prince Dannilo, would disdain the beautiful Sonia only to have her rush the more surely to his arms in the finale. Rather a dangerous fantasy for a backward young man from the provinces who was beginning to lose his shyness!

There was, indeed, very little shyness about him when, one evening after seeing Miss Callermere home, he was startled by the sight of a young parlourmaid, who had been sent out to post a letter, some fifty yards from Miss Callermere's house. If she bore little or no likeness to Miss Lily Elsie in the role of Sonia, she certainly looked quite lovely in her white cap and the streamers that were then worn. And she was smiling and friendly and natural.

She was, of course, Ethel Fairbrass. She lingered with George Muncey for over five minutes. And then comes another of those strange little dialogues.

"Funny a girl like you being a slavey! When's your evening off?"

"Six o'clock to-morrow. But what's it got to do with you?"

"I'll meet you at the corner of this road. Promise you I will."

"Takes two to make a promise. My name's Ethel Fairbrass, if you want to know. What's yours?"

"Dannilo."

"*Coo!* Fancy calling you that! Dannilo What?"

George had not foreseen the necessity for inventing a surname and discovered that it is quite difficult. He couldn't very well say "Smith" or "Robinson", so he said:

"Prince."

George, it will be observed, was not an imaginative man. When she met him the following night he could think of nowhere to take her but to *The Merry Widow*. He was even foolish enough to let her have a programme, but she did not read the names of the characters. When the curtain went up she was too entranced with Miss Lily Elsie, whom (like every pretty girl at the time) she thought she resembled, to take any notice of Mr. Joseph Coyne and his character name. If she had tumbled to the witless transposition of the names

she might have become suspicious of him. In which case George Muncey might have lived to a ripe old age.

But she didn't.

4

Altogether, Ethel Fairbrass provided an extremely satisfactory substitute for the dream-woman of George's fantasy. Life was beginning to sweeten. In the daylight hours he would enjoy his friendship with Miss Callermere, the pleasure of which was in no way touched by his infatuation for the pretty parlourmaid.

In early September Ethel became entitled to her holiday. She spent the whole fortnight with George at Southend. And George wrote daily to Miss Callermere, telling her that he was filling the place of a chemist-friend of his mother's, while the latter took his holiday. He actually contrived to have the letters addressed to the care of a local chemist. The letters were addressed "George Muncey" while at the hotel the couple were registered as "Mr. and Mrs. D. Prince."

Now the fictional Prince Dannilo was notoriously an open-handed and free-living fellow—and Dannilo Prince proceeded to follow in his footsteps. Ethel Fairbrass undoubtedly had the time of her life. They occupied a suite. ("Coo! A bathroom all to our own two selves, and use it whenever we like!")

He hired a car for her, with chauffeur—which cost ten pounds a day at that time. He gave her champagne whenever he could induce her to drink it and bought her some quite expensive presents.

It is a little surprising that at the end of a fortnight of this kind of thing she went back to her occupation. But she did. There was nothing of the mercenary about Ethel.

On his return to London, George was very glad to see Miss Callermere. They resumed their interminable walks and he went almost daily to her house for lunch or dinner. A valuable arrangement, this, for the little diversion at Southend had made a sizeable hole in his eight hundred pounds.

It was a bit of a nuisance to have to leave early in order to snatch a few minutes with Ethel. After Southend, the few snatched minutes had somehow lost their charm. There were, too, Ethel's half-days

and her Sundays, the latter involving him in a great many troublesome lies to Miss Callermere.

In the middle of October he started sneaking off to *The Merry Widow* again. Which was a bad sign. For it meant that he was turning back again from reality to his dream-life. The Reality, in the meantime, had lost her high spirits and was inclined to weep unreasonably and to nag more than a little.

At the beginning of November Ethel presented him with certain very valid arguments in favour of fixing the date of their wedding, a matter which had hitherto been kept vaguely in the background.

George was by now heartily sick of her and contemplated leaving her in the lurch. Strangely enough, it was her final threat to tell Miss Callermere that turned the scale and decided George to make the best of a bad job and marry her.

5

As Dannilo Prince he married her one foggy morning at the registrar's office in Henrietta Street. Mr. and Mrs. Fairbrass came up from Banbury for the wedding. They were not very nice about it, although from the social point of view the marriage might be regarded as a step-up for Ethel.

"Where are you going for your honeymoon?" asked Mrs. Fairbrass. "That is—if you're going to *have* a honeymoon."

"Southend," said the unimaginative George, and to Southend he took her for the second time. There was no need for a suite now, so they went to a small family-and-commercial hotel. Here George was unreasonably jealous of the commercial travellers, who were merely being polite to a rather forlorn bride. In wretched weather he insisted on taking her for walks, with the result that he himself caught a very bad cold. Eucalyptus and hot toddy became the dominant note in a town which was associated in the girl's mind with champagne and bath salts. But they had to stick it for the full fortnight, because George had told Miss Callermere that he was again acting as substitute for the chemist-friend of his mother's in Southend.

According to the files of the Department, they left Southend by

the three-fifteen on the thirtieth of November. George had taken first-class returns. The three-fifteen was a popular non-stop, but on this occasion there were hardly a score of persons travelling to London. One of the first-class carriages was occupied by a man alone with a young baby wrapped in a red shawl. Ethel wanted to get into this compartment, perhaps having a sneaking hope that the man would require her assistance in dealing with the baby. But George did not intend to concern himself with babies one moment before he would be compelled to do so, and they went into another compartment.

Ethel, however, seems to have looked forward to her impending career with a certain pleasure. Before leaving Southend she had paid a visit to one of those shops that cater for summer visitors and miraculously remain open through the winter. She had a bulky parcel, which she opened in the rather pathetic belief that it would amuse George.

The parcel contained a large child's bucket, a disproportionately small wooden spade, a sailing-boat to the scale of the spade, a length of Southend rock and a rubber trumpet, of which the stem was wrapped with red and blue wool. It was a baby's trumpet and of rubber so that it should not hurt the baby's gums. In the mouth-piece, shielded by the rubber, was a little metal contraption that made the noise.

Ethel put the trumpet to her mouth and blew through the metal contraption.

Perhaps, in fancy, she heard her baby doing it. Perhaps, after a honeymoon of neglect and misery, she was making a desperate snatch at the spirit of gaiety, hoping he would attend to her and perhaps indulge in a little horseplay. But for the actual facts we have to depend on George's version.

"I said 'Don't make that noise, Ethel—I'm trying to read' or something like that. And she said 'I feel like a bit of music to cheer me up' and she went on blowing the trumpet. So I caught hold of it and threw it out of the window. I didn't hurt her and she didn't seem to mind much. And we didn't have another quarrel over it and I went on reading my paper until we got to London."

The Rubber Trumpet

At Fenchurch Street they claimed their luggage and left the station. Possibly Ethel abandoned the parcel containing the other toys for they were never heard of again.

When the train was being cleaned, a dead baby was found under the seat of a first-class compartment, wrapped in a red shawl. It was subsequently ascertained that the baby had not been directly murdered but had died more or less naturally in convulsions.

But before this was known, Scotland Yard searched for the man who had been seen to enter the train with the baby, as if for a murderer. A platelayer found the rubber trumpet on the line and forwarded it. Detectives combed the shops of Southend and found that only one rubber trumpet had been sold—to a young woman whom the shopkeeper did not know. The trail ended here.

The rubber trumpet went to the Department of Dead Ends.

6

Of the eight hundred pounds there was a little over a hundred and fifty left by the time they returned from the official honeymoon at Southend. He took her to furnished rooms in Ladbroke Grove and a few days later to a tenement in the same district, which he furnished at a cost of thirty pounds.

She seems to have asked him no awkward questions about money. Every morning after breakfast he would leave the tenement, presumably in order to go to work. Actually he would loaf about the West End until it was time to meet Miss Callermere. He liked especially going to the house in Battersea for lunch on Sundays. And here, of course, the previous process reversed itself and it was Ethel who had to be told the troublesome lies that were so difficult to invent.

"You seem so different lately, George," said Miss Callermere one Sunday after lunch. "I believe you're living with a ballet girl."

George was not quite sure what a ballet girl was, but it sounded rather magnificently wicked. As he was anxious not to involve himself in further inventions, he said:

"She's not a ballet girl. She used to be a parlourmaid."

"I really only want to know one thing about her," said Miss Callermere. "And that is, whether you are fond of her?"

"No, I'm not!" said George with complete truthfulness.

"It's a pity to have that kind of thing in your life—you are dedicated to science. For your own sake, George, why not get rid of her?"

Why not? George wondered why he had not thought of it before. He had only to move, to stop calling himself by the ridiculous name of Dannilo Prince, and the thing was as good as done. He would go back at once and pack.

When he got back to the tenement, Ethel gave him an unexpectedly warm reception.

"You told me you were going to the S.D.P. Sunday Brotherhood, you did! And you never went near them, because you met that there Miss Callermere in Battersea Park, because I followed you and saw you. And then you went back to her house, which is Number Fifteen, Laurel Road, which I didn't know before. And what you can see in a dried-up old maid like that beats me. It's time she knew that she's rolling her silly sheep's eyes at another woman's husband. And I'm going to tell her before I'm a day older."

She was whipping on hat and coat and George lurched forward to stop her. His foot caught on a gas-ring, useless now that he had installed a gas-range—a piece of lumber that Ethel ought to have removed weeks ago. But she used it as a stand for the iron.

George picked up the gas-ring. If she were to go to Miss Callermere and make a brawl, he himself would probably never be able to go there again. He pushed her quickly on to the bed, then swung the gas-ring—swung it several times.

He put all the towels, every soft absorbent thing he could find, under the bed. Then he washed himself, packed a suitcase and left the tenement.

He took the suitcase to his old lodgings, announced that he had come back there to live, and then presented himself at the house in Battersea in time for supper.

"I've done what you told me," he said to Miss Callermere. "Paid her off. Shan't hear from her any more."

The Monday morning papers carried the news of the murder, for

the police had been called on Sunday evening by the tenants of the flat below. The hunt was started for Dannilo Prince.

By Tuesday the dead girl's parents had been interviewed and her life-story appeared on Wednesday morning.

"My daughter was married to Prince at the Henrietta Street registrar's office on November 16th, 1907. He took her straight away for a honeymoon at Southend, where they stayed a fortnight."

There was a small crowd at the bottom of Laurel Road to gape at the house where she had so recently worked as a parlourmaid. Fifty yards from Number Fifteen! But if Miss Callermere noticed the crowd she is not recorded as having made any comment upon it to anyone.

In a few days, Scotland Yard knew that they would never find Dannilo Prince. In fact, it had all been as simple as George had anticipated. He had just moved—and that was the end of his unlucky marriage. The addition of the murder had not complicated things, because he had left no clue behind him.

Now, as there was nothing whatever to connect George Muncey with Dannilo Prince, George's chances of arrest were limited to the chance of an accidental meeting between himself and someone who had known him as Prince. There was an hotel proprietor, a waiter and a chambermaid at Southend and an estate agent at Ladbroke Grove. And, of course, Ethel's father and mother. Of these persons only the estate agent lived in London.

A barrister, who was also a statistician, entertained himself by working out the averages. He came to the conclusion that George Muncey's chance of being caught was equal to his chance of winning the first prize in the Calcutta Sweep *twenty-three times in succession*.

But the barrister did not calculate the chances of the illogical guess-work of the Department of Dead Ends hitting the bull's-eye by mistake.

While the hue and cry for Dannilo Prince passed over his head, George Muncey dedicated himself to science with such energy that

in a fortnight he had obtained a post with a chemist in Walham. Here he presided over a counter devoted to fancy soaps, hot-water bottles, photographic apparatus and the like—for which he received two pounds a week and a minute commission that added zest to his work.

At Easter he married Miss Callermere in church. That lady had mobilised all her late father's associates and, to their inward amusement, arrayed herself in white satin and veil for the ceremony. As it would have been unreasonable to ask George's employers for a holiday after so short a term of service, the newly married couple dispensed with a honeymoon. The aunt entered a home for indigent gentlewomen with an allowance of a hundred a year from her niece. George once again found himself in a spacious, well-run house.

During their brief married life, this oddly assorted couple seem to have been perfectly happy. The late Mr. Callermere's friends were allowed to slip back into oblivion, because they showed a tendency to giggle whenever George absent-mindedly addressed his wife as "Miss Callermere".

His earnings of two pounds a week may have seemed insignificant beside his wife's unearned income. But in fact it was the basis of their married happiness. Every Saturday he handed her the whole of his wages. She would retain twenty-five shillings, because they both considered it essential to his self-respect that he should pay the cost of his food. She handed him back fifteen shillings for pocket-money. She read the papers and formed his opinions for him. She seemed to allow him little of what most men would regard as pleasure, but George had no complaint on this score.

Spring passed into summer and nearly everybody had forgotten the murder of Ethel Prince in a tenement in Ladbroke Grove. It is probably true to say that, in any real sense of the word, George Muncey had forgotten it too. He had read very little and did not know that murderers were popularly supposed to be haunted by their crime and to start guiltily at every chance mention of it.

He received no reaction whatever when his employer said to him one morning:

"There's this job-line of rubber trumpets. I took half a gross.

We'll mark them at one-and-a-penny. Put one on your counter with the rubber teats and try them on women with babies."

George took one of the rubber trumpets from the cardboard case containing the half gross. It had red and blue wool wound about the stem. He put it next the rubber teats and forgot about it.

8

Wilkins, the other assistant, held his pharmaceutical certificate, but he was not stand-offish on that account. One day, to beguile the boredom of the slack hour after lunch, he picked up the rubber trumpet and blew it.

Instantly George was sitting in the train with Ethel, telling her "not to make that noise". When Wilkins put the trumpet down, George found himself noticing the trumpet and thought the red and blue wool very hideous. He picked it up—Ethel's had felt just like that when he had thrown it out of the window.

Now it cannot for one moment be held that George felt anything in the nature of remorse. The truth was that the rubber trumpet, by reminding him so vividly of Ethel, had stirred up dormant forces in his nature. Ethel had been very comely and jolly and playful when one was in the mood for it—as one often was, in spite of everything.

The trumpet, in short, produced little more than a sense of bewilderment. Why could not things have gone on as they began? It was only as a wife that Ethel was utterly intolerable, because she had no sense of order and did not really look after a chap. Now that he was married to Miss Callermere, if only Ethel had been available on, say, Wednesday evenings and alternate Sundays, life would have been full at once of colour and comfort. . . . He tried to sell the trumpet to a lady with a little girl and a probable baby at home, but without success.

On the next day he went as far as admitting to himself that the trumpet had got on his nerves. Between a quarter to one and a quarter past, when Wilkins was out to lunch, he picked up the trumpet and blew it. And just before closing-time he blew it again, when Wilkins was there.

George was not subtle enough to humbug himself. The trumpet stirred longings that were better suppressed. So the next day he wrote out a bill for one-and-a-penny, put one-and-a-penny of his pocket money into the cash register and stuffed the trumpet into his coat pocket. Before supper that night he put it in the hot-water furnace.

"There's a terrible smell in the house. What did you put in the furnace, George?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me the truth, dear."

"A rubber trumpet stuck on my counter. Fair got on my nerves, it did. I paid the one-and-a-penny and I burnt it."

"That was very silly, wasn't it? It'll make you short in your pocket money. And in the circumstances I don't feel inclined to make it up for you."

That would be all right, George assured her, and inwardly thought how lucky he was to have such a wife. She could keep a fellow steady and pull him up when he went one over the odds.

Three days later his employer looked through the stock.

"I see that rubber trumpet has gone. Put up another. It may be a good line."

And so the whole business began over again. George, it will be observed, for all his unimaginativeness, was a spiritually economical man. His happy contentment with his wife would, he knew, be jeopardised if he allowed himself to be reminded of that other disorderly, fascinating side of life that had been presided over by Ethel.

There were six dozen of the rubber trumpets, minus the one burnt at home, and his employer would expect one-and-a-penny for each of them. Thirteen shillings a dozen. But the dozens themselves were thirteen, which complicated the calculation, but in the end he got the sum right. He made sure of this by doing it backwards and "proving" it. He still had twenty-three pounds left out of the eight hundred.

Mrs. Muncey had a rather nice crocodile dressing-case which she had bought for herself and quite falsely described as "gift of the bridegroom to the bride".

The Rubber Trumpet

On the next day George borrowed the crocodile dressing-case on the plea that he wished to bring some goods from the shop home for Christmas. He brought it into the shop on the plea that it contained his dinner jacket and that he intended to change at the house of a friend without going home that night. As he was known to have married "an heiress" neither Wilkins nor his employer was particularly surprised that he should possess a dinner jacket and a crocodile dressing-case in which to carry it about.

At a quarter to one, when he was again alone in the shop, he crammed half a gross (less one) of rubber trumpets into the crocodile dressing-case. When his employer came back from lunch he said:

"I've got rid of all those rubber trumpets, Mr. Arrowsmith. An old boy came in, said he was to do with an orphanage, and I talked him into buying the lot."

Mr. Arrowsmith was greatly astonished.

"Bought the lot, did you say? Didn't he ask for a discount?"

"No, Mr. Arrowsmith. I think he was a bit loopy myself."

Mr. Arrowsmith looked very hard at George and then at the cash register. Six thirteens, less one, at one-and-a-penny—four pounds, three and fivepence. It was certainly a very funny thing. But then, the freak customer appears from time to time and at the end of the day Mr. Arrowsmith had got over his surprise.

Journeying from Walham to Battersea, one goes on the Underground to Victoria Station, and continues the journey on the main line. From the fact that George Muncey that evening took the crocodile case to Victoria Station, it has been argued that he intended to take the rubber trumpets home and perhaps bury them in the garden or deal with them in some other way. But this ignores the fact that he told his wife he intended to bring home some goods for Christmas.

The point is of minor importance, because the dressing-case never reached home with him that night. At the top of the steps leading from the Underground it was snatched from him.

George's first sensation, on realising that he had been robbed, was one of relief. The rubber trumpets, he had already found, could not be burnt; they would certainly have been a very great nuisance to

him. The case, he knew, cost fifteen guineas, and there was still enough left of the twenty-three pounds to buy a new one on the following day.

9

At closing-time the next day, while George and Wilkins were tidying-up, Mr. Arrowsmith was reading the evening paper.

"Here, Muncey! Listen to this. 'Jake Mendel, thirty-seven, of no fixed abode, was charged before Mr. Ramsden this morning with the theft of a crocodile dressing-case from the precincts of Victoria Station. Mr. Ramsden asked the police what was inside the bag. "A number of toy trumpets, your worship, made of rubber. There were seventy-seven of 'em all told."' Mr. Ramsden: "Seventy-seven rubber trumpets! Well, *now* there really is no reason why the police should not have their own band" (Laughter).' " Mr. Arrowsmith laughed too and then: "Muncey, that looks like your lunatic."

"Yes, Mr. Arrowsmith," said George indifferently, then went contentedly home to receive his wife's expostulations about a new crocodile dressing-case which had been delivered during the afternoon. It was not quite the same to look at, because the original one had been made to order. But it had been bought at the same shop and the manager had obliged George by charging the same price for it.

In the meantime, the police were relying on the newspaper paragraph to produce the owner of the crocodile case. When he failed to materialise on the following morning they looked at the name of the manufacturer and took the case round to him.

The manufacturer informed them that he had made that case the previous Spring to the order of a Miss Callermere—that the lady had since married and that, only the previous day, her husband, Mr. Muncey, had ordered an exactly similar one but had accepted a substitute from stock.

"Ring up George Muncey and ask him to come up and identify the case—and take away these india-rubber trumpets!" ordered the Superintendent.

Mrs. Muncey answered the telephone and from her they obtained George's business address.

"A chemist's assistant!" said the Superintendent. "Seems to me rather rum. Those trumpets may be his employer's stock. And he may have been pinching 'em. Don't ring him up—go down. And find out if the employer has anything to say about the stock. See him before you see Muncey."

At Walham the Sergeant was taken into the dispensary where he promptly enquired whether Mr. Arrowsmith had missed seventy-seven rubber trumpets from his stock.

"I haven't missed them—but I sold them the day before yesterday—seventy-seven, that's right! Or rather, my assistant, George Muncey, did. Here, Muncey!" And as George appeared:

"You sold the rest of the stock of those rubber trumpets to a gentleman who said he was connected with an orphanage—the day before yesterday it was—didn't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Arrowsmith," said George.

"Bought the lot without asking for a discount," said Mr. Arrowsmith proudly. "Four pounds, three shillings and five-pence. I could tell you of another case that happened years ago when a man came into this very shop and——"

The Sergeant felt his head whirling a little. The assistant had sold seventy-seven rubber trumpets to an eccentric gentleman. The goods had been duly paid for and taken away—and the goods were subsequently found in the assistant's wife's dressing-case.

"Did you happen to have a crocodile dressing-case stolen from you at Victoria Station the day before yesterday, Mr. Muncey?" asked the Sergeant.

George was in a quandary. If he admitted that the crocodile case was his wife's—he would admit to Mr. Arrowsmith that he had been lying when he had said that he had cleverly sold the whole of the seventy-seven rubber trumpets without even having to give away a discount. So:

"No," said George.

"Ah, I thought not! There's a mistake somewhere. I expect it's that manufacturer put us wrong. Sorry to have troubled you, gentlemen! Good morning!"

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Arrowsmith. "You *did* have a crocodile

dressings-case here that day, Muncey, with your evening clothes in it. And you *do* go home by Victoria. But what is that about the trumpets, Sergeant? They couldn't have been in Mr. Muncey's case if he sold them over the counter."

"I don't know what they've got hold of, Mr. Arrowsmith, and that's a fact," said George. "I think I'm wanted in the shop."

George was troubled, so he got leave to go home early. He told his wife how he had lied to the police, and confessed to her about the trumpets. Soon she had made him tell her the real reason for his dislike of the trumpets. The result was that when the police brought her the original crocodile case she flatly denied that it was hers.

In law, there was no means by which the ownership of the case could be foisted upon the Munceys against their will. Pending the trial of Jake Mendel, the bag-snatcher, the crocodile case, with its seventy-seven rubber trumpets, was deposited with the Department of Dead Ends.

A few feet above it on a shelf stood the identical trumpet which George Muncey had thrown out of the window on the three-fifteen, non-stop Southend to Fenchurch Street, some seven months ago.

The Department took one of the trumpets from the bag and set it beside the trumpet on the shelf. There was no logical connection between them whatever. The Department simply guessed that there might be a connection.

They tried to connect Walham with Southend and drew blank. They traced the history of the seventy-seven Walham trumpets and found it simple enough until the moment when George Muncey put them in the crocodile case.

They went back to the Southend trumpet and read in their files that it had not been bought by the man with the baby but by a young woman.

Then they tried a cross-reference to young women and Southend. They found that dead end, the Ethel Fairbrass murder. They found: "*My daughter was married to Prince at the Henrietta Street registrar's office on November the sixteenth, 1907. He took her straight away for a honeymoon at Southend where they stayed a fortnight.*"

The Rubber Trumpet

Fourteen days from November the sixteenth meant November the thirtieth, the day the rubber trumpet was found on the line.

One rubber trumpet is dropped on railway line by (possibly) a young woman. The young woman is subsequently murdered (but not with a rubber trumpet). A young man behaves in an eccentric way with seventy-seven rubber trumpets more than six months later.

The connection was wholly illogical. But the Department specialised in illogical connections. It communicated its wild guess—in the form of a guarded Minute—to Detective-Inspector Rason.

Rason went down to Banbury and brought the old Fairbrass couple to Walham.

He gave them five shillings and sent them into Arrowsmith's to buy a hot-water bottle.

The Dauphin's Doll

ELLERY QUEEN

There is a law among story-tellers, originally passed by Editors at the cries (they say) of their constituents, which states that stories about Christmas shall have children in them. This Christmas story is no exception; indeed, misopedists will complain that we have overdone it. And we confess in advance that this is also a story about Dolls, and that Santa Claus comes into it, and even a thief; though as to this last, whoever he was—and that was one of the questions—he was certainly not Barabbas, even parabolically.

Another section of the statute governing Christmas stories provides that they shall incline towards Sweetness and Light. The first arises, of course, from the orphans and the never-souring savour of the annual Miracle; as for Light, it will be provided at the end, as usual, by that luminous prodigy, Ellery Queen. The reader of gloomier temper will also find a large measure of Darkness, in the person and works of one who, at least in Inspector Queen's harassed view, was surely the winged Prince of that region. His name, by the way, was not Satan, it was Comus; and this is paradox enow, since the original Comus, as everyone knows, was the god of festive joy and mirth, emotions not commonly associated with the Underworld. As Ellery struggled to embrace his phantom foe, he puzzled over this *non sequitur* in vain; in vain, that is, until Nikki Porter, no scorner of the obvious, suggested that he *might* seek the answer where any ordinary mortal would go at once. And there, to the great man's mortification, it was indeed to be found: on page 262b of Volume 6, *Coleb to Damasci*, of the 175th Anniversary edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. A French conjurer of that name—Comus—

The Dauphin's Doll

performing in London in the year 1789 caused his wife to vanish from the top of a table—the very first time, it appeared, that this feat, uxorial or otherwise, had been accomplished without the aid of mirrors. To track his dark adversary's *nom de nuit* to its historic lair gave Ellery his only glint of satisfaction until that blessed moment when light burst all around him and exorcised the darkness, Prince and all.

But this is chaos.

Our story properly begins not with our invisible character but with our dead one.

Miss Ypson had not always been dead; *au contraire*. She had lived for seventy-eight years, for most of them breathing hard. As her father used to remark, "She was a very active little verb." Miss Ypson's father was a professor of Greek at a small Mid-western university. He had conjugated his daughter with the rather bewildered assistance of one of his brawnier students, an Iowa poultry heiress.

Professor Ypson was a man of distinction. Unlike most professors of Greek, he was a Greek professor of Greek, having been born Gerasymos Aghamos Ypsilonomon in Polykhnitos, on the island of Mytilini, "where," he was fond of recalling on certain occasions, "burning Sappho loved and sung"—a quotation he found unfailingly useful in his extracurricular activities; and, the Hellenic ideal notwithstanding, Professor Ypson believed wholeheartedly in immoderation in all things. This hereditary and cultural background explains the professor's interest in fatherhood—to his wife's chagrin, for Mrs. Ypson's own breeding prowess was confined to the barnyards on which her income was based—a fact of which her husband sympathetically reminded her whenever he happened to sire another wayward chick; he held their daughter to be nothing less than a biological miracle.

The professor's mental processes also tended to confuse Mrs. Ypson. She never ceased to wonder why instead of shortening his name to Ypson, her husband had not sensibly changed it to Jones. "My dear," the professor once replied, "you are an Iowa snob." "But nobody," Mrs. Ypson cried, "can spell it or pronounce it!"

"This is a cross," murmured Professor Ypson, "which we must bear with Ypsilanti." "Oh," said Mrs. Ypson.

There was invariably something Sibylline about his conversation. His favourite adjective for his wife was "ypsiliform", a term, he explained, which referred to the germinal spot at one of the fecundation stages in a ripening egg and which was, therefore, exquisitely *à propos*. Mrs. Ypson continued to look bewildered; she died at an early age.

And the professor ran off with a Kansas City variety girl of considerable talent, leaving his baptized chick to be reared by an eggish relative of her mother's, a Presbyterian named Jukes.

The only time Miss Ypson heard from her father—except when he wrote charming and erudite little notes requesting, as he termed it, *lucrum*—was in the fourth decade of his odyssey, when he sent her a handsome addition to her collection, a terra-cotta play doll of Greek origin over three thousand years old, which, unhappily, Miss Ypson felt duty bound to return to the Brooklyn museum from which it had unaccountably vanished. The note accompanying her father's gift had said, whimsically: "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*"

There was poetry behind Miss Ypson's dolls. At her birth the professor, ever harmonious, signalized his devotion to fecundity by naming her Cytherea. This proved the Olympian irony. For, it turned out, her father's philoprogenitiveness throbbed frustrate in her mother's stony womb; even though Miss Ypson interred five husbands of quite adequate vigour, she remained infertile to the end of her days. Hence it is classically tragic to find her, when all passion was spent, a sweet little old lady with a vague if eager smile who, under the name of her father, pattered about a vast and echoing New York apartment playing enthusiastically with dolls.

In the beginning they were dolls of a common clay: a Billiken, a kewpie, a Kathe Kruse, a Patsy, a Foxy Grandpa, and so forth. But then, as her need increased, Miss Ypson began her fierce sack of the past.

Down into the land of the Pharaoh she went for two pieces of thin desiccated board, carved and painted and with hair of strung beads, and legless—so that they might not run away—which any connoisseur

The Dauphin's Doll

will tell you are the most superb specimens of ancient Egyptian paddle doll extant, far superior to those in the British Museum, although this fact will be denied in certain quarters.

Miss Ypson unearthed a foremother of "Letitia Penn", until her discovery held to be the oldest doll in America, having been brought to Philadelphia from England in 1699 by William Penn as a gift for a playmate of his small daughter's. Miss Ypson's find was a wooden-hearted "little lady" in brocade and velvet which had been sent by Sir Walter Raleigh to the first English child born in the New World. Since Virginia Dare had been born in 1587, not even the Smithsonian dared impugn Miss Ypson's triumph.

On the old lady's racks, in her plate-glass cases, might be seen the wealth of a thousand childhoods, and some riches—for such is the genetics of dolls—possessed by children grown. Here could be found "fashion babies" from fourteenth-century France, sacred dolls of the Orange Free State Fingo tribe, Satsuma paper dolls and court dolls from old Japan, beady-eyed "Kalifa" dolls of the Egyptian Sudan, Swedish birch-bark dolls, "Katcina" dolls of the Hopis, mammoth-tooth dolls of the Eskimos, feather dolls of the Chippewa, tumble dolls of the ancient Chinese, Coptic bone dolls, Roman dolls dedicated to Diana, *pantin* dolls which had been the street toys of Parisian exquisites before Madame Guillotine swept the boulevards, early Christian dolls in their *crèches* representing the Holy Family—to specify the merest handful of Miss Ypson's Briarean collection. She possessed dolls of pasteboard, dolls of animal skin, spool dolls, crab-claw dolls, eggshell dolls, cornhusk dolls, rag dolls, pine-cone dolls with moss hair, stocking dolls, dolls of *bisque*, dolls of palm leaf, dolls of *papier mâché*, even dolls made of seed pods. There were dolls forty inches tall, and there were dolls so little Miss Ypson could hide them in her gold thimble.

Cytherea Ypson's collection bestrode the centuries and took tribute of history. There was no greater—not the fabled playthings of Montezuma, or Victoria's, or Eugene Fields'; not the collection at the Metropolitan, or the South Kensington, or the royal palace in old Bucharest, or anywhere outside the enchantment of little girls' dreams.

Ellery Queen

It was made of Iowan eggs and the Attic shore, corn-fed and myrtle-clothed; and it brings us at last to Attorney John Somerset Bondling and his visit to the Queen residence one December twenty-third not so very long ago.

December the twenty-third is ordinarily not a good time to seek the Queens. Inspector Richard Queen likes his Christmas old-fashioned; his turkey stuffing, for instance, calls for twenty-two hours of over-all preparation, and some of its ingredients are not readily found at the corner grocer's. And Ellery is a frustrated gift-wrapper. For a month before Christmas he turns his sleuthing genius to tracking down unusual wrapping papers, fine ribbons, and artistic stickers; and he spends the last two days creating beauty.

So it was that when Attorney John S. Bondling called, Inspector Queen was in his kitchen, swathed in a barbecue apron, up to his elbows in *fines herbes*, while Ellery, behind the locked door of his study, composed a secret symphony in glittering fuchsia metallic paper, forest-green moiré ribbon, and pine cones.

"It's almost useless," shrugged Nikki, studying Attorney Bondling's card, which was as crackly-looking as Attorney Bondling. "You say you know the Inspector, Mr. Bondling?"

"Just tell him Bondling the estate lawyer," said Bondling neurotically. "Park Row. He'll know."

"Don't blame me," said Nikki, "if you wind up in his stuffing. Goodness knows he's used everything else." And she went for Inspector Queen.

While she was gone, the study door opened noiselessly for one inch. A suspicious eye reconnoitred from the crack.

"Don't be alarmed," said the owner of the eye, slipping through the crack and locking the door hastily behind him. "Can't trust them, you know. Children, just children."

"Children!" Attorney Bondling snarled. "You're Ellery Queen, aren't you?"

"Yes?"

"Interested in youth, are you? Christmas? Orphans, dolls, that sort of thing?" Mr. Bondling went on in a remarkably nasty way.

"I suppose so."

The Dauphin's Doll

"The more fool you. Ah, here's your father. Inspector Queen——!"

"Oh, that Bondling," said the old gentleman absently, shaking his visitor's hand. "My office called to say someone was coming up. Here, use my handkerchief; that's a bit of turkey liver. Know my son? His secretary, Miss Porter? What's on your mind, Mr. Bondling?"

"Inspector, I'm handling the Cytherea Ypson estate, and——"

"Nice meeting you, Mr. Bondling," said Ellery. "Nikki, that door is locked, so don't pretend you forgot the way to the bathroom. . . ."

"Cytherea Ypson," frowned the Inspector. "Oh, yes. She died only recently."

"Leaving me the headache," said Mr. Bondling bitterly, "of disposing of her Dollection."

"Her what?" asked Ellery, looking up from the key.

"Dolls—collection. Dollection. She coined the word."

Ellery put the key back in his pocket and strolled over to his armchair.

"Do I take this down?" sighed Nikki.

"Dollection," said Ellery.

"Spent about thirty years at it. Dolls!"

"Yes, Nikki, take it down."

"Well, well, Mr. Bondling," said Inspector Queen. "What's the problem? Christmas comes but once a year, you know."

"Will provides the Dollection be sold at auction," grated the attorney, "and the proceeds used to set up a fund for orphan children. I'm holding the public sale right after New Year's."

"Dolls and orphans, eh?" said the Inspector, thinking of Javanese black pepper and Country Gentleman Seasoning Salt.

"That's *nice*," beamed Nikki.

"Oh, is it?" said Mr. Bondling softly. "Apparently, young woman, you've never tried to satisfy a Surrogate. I've administered estates for nine years without a whisper against me, but let an estate involve the interests of just one little ba—little fatherless child, and you'd think from the Surrogate's attitude I was Bill Sykes himself!"

"My stuffing," began the Inspector.

"I've had those dolls catalogued. The result is frightening! Did

you know there's no set market for the damnable things? And aside from a few personal possessions, the Dollection constitutes the old lady's entire estate. Sank every nickel she had in it."

"But it should be worth a fortune," protested Ellery.

"To whom, Mr. Queen? Museums always want such things as free and unencumbered gifts. I tell you, except for one item, those hypothetical orphans won't realize enough from that sale to keep them in—in bubble gum for two days!"

"Which item would that be, Mr. Bondling?"

"Number Eight-seventy-four," snapped the lawyer. "This one."

"Number Eight-seventy-four," read Inspector Queen from the fat catalogue Bondling had fished out of a large greatcoat pocket. "The Dauphin's Doll. Unique. Ivory figure of a boy Prince eight inches tall, clad in court dress, genuine ermine, brocade, velvet. Court sword in gold strapped to waist. Gold circlet crown surmounted by a single blue brilliant diamond of finest water, weight approximately 49 carats——"

"How many carats?" exclaimed Nikki.

"Larger than the *Hope* and the *Star of South Africa*," said Ellery, with a certain excitement.

"—appraised," continued his father, "at one hundred and ten thousand dollars."

"Expensive dollie."

"Indecent!" said Nikki.

"This indecent—I mean exquisite royal doll," the Inspector read on, "was a birthday gift from King Louis XVI of France to Louis Charles, his second son, who became Dauphin at the death of his elder brother in 1789. The little Dauphin was proclaimed Louis XVII by the royalists during the French Revolution while in custody of the *sans-culottes*. His fate is shrouded in mystery. Romantic, historic item."

"*Le prince perdu*. I'll say," muttered Ellery. "Mr. Bondling, is this on the level?"

"I'm an attorney, not an antiquarian," snapped their visitor. "There are documents attached, one of them a sworn statement—holograph—by Lady Charlotte Atkyns, the English actress-friend of

The Dauphin's Doll

the Capet family—she was in France during the Revolution—or purporting to be in Lady Charlotte's hand. It doesn't matter, Mr. Queen. Even if the history is bad, the diamond's good!"

"I take it this hundred-and-ten-thousand dollar dollie constitutes the bone, as it were, or that therein lies the rub?"

"You said it!" cried Mr. Bondling, cracking his knuckles in a sort of agony. "For my money the Dauphin's Doll is the only negotiable asset of that collection. And what's the old lady do? She provides by will that on the day preceding Christmas the Cytherea Ypson Dollection is to be publicly displayed . . . on the main floor of Nash's Department Store! *The day before Christmas, gentlemen!* Think of it!"

"But why?" asked Nikki, puzzled.

"Why? Who knows why? For the entertainment of New York's army of little beggars, I suppose! Have you any notion how many peasants pass through Nash's on the day before Christmas? My cook tells me—she's a very religious woman—it's like Armageddon."

"Day before Christmas," frowned Ellery. "That's to-morrow."

"It does sound chancey," said Nikki anxiously. Then she brightened. "Oh, well, maybe Nash's won't co-operate, Mr. Bondling."

"Oh, won't they!" howled Mr. Bondling. "Why, old lady Ypson had this stunt cooked up with that gang of peasant-purveyors for years! They've been snapping at my heels ever since the day she was put away!"

"It'll draw every crook in New York," said the Inspector, his gaze on the kitchen door.

"Orphans," said Nikki. "The orphans' interests *must* be protected." She looked at her employer accusingly.

"Special measures, Dad," said Ellery.

"Sure, sure," said the Inspector, rising. "Don't you worry about this, Mr. Bondling. Now if you'll be kind enough to excu——"

"Inspector Queen," hissed Mr. Bondling, leaning forward tensely, "that is not all."

"Ah." Ellery briskly lit a cigarette. "There's a specific villain in this piece, Mr. Bondling, and you know who he is."

"I do," said the lawyer hollowly, "and then again I don't. I mean, it's Comus."

Ellery Queen

"Comus!" the Inspector screamed.

"Comus?" said Ellery slowly.

"Comus?" said Nikki. "Who dat?"

"Comus," nodded Mr. Bondling. "First thing this morning. Marched right into my office, bold as day—must have followed me; I hadn't got my coat off, my secretary wasn't even in. Marched in and tossed his card on my desk."

Ellery seized it. "The usual, Dad."

"His trade-mark," growled the Inspector, his lips working.

"But the card just says 'Comus'," complained Nikki. "Who——?"

"Go on, Mr. Bondling!" thundered the Inspector.

"And he calmly announced to me," said Bondling, blotting his cheeks with an exhausted handkerchief, "that he's going to steal the Dauphin's Doll to-morrow, in Nash's."

"Oh, a maniac," said Nikki.

"Mr. Bondling," said the old gentleman in a terrible voice, "just what did this fellow look like?"

"Foreigner—black beard—spoke with a thick accent of some sort. To tell you the truth, I was so thunderstruck I didn't notice details. Didn't even chase him till it was too late."

The Queens shrugged at each other, Gallically.

"The old story," said the Inspector; the corners of his nostrils were greenish. "The brass of the colonel's monkey and when he does show himself nobody remembers anything but beards and foreign accents. Well, Mr. Bondling, with Comus in the game it's serious business. Where's the collection right now?"

"In the vaults of the Life Bank and Trust, Forty-third Street branch."

"What time are you to move it over to Nash's?"

"They wanted it this evening. I said nothing doing. I've made special arrangements with the bank, and the collection's to be moved at seven-thirty to-morrow morning."

"Won't be much time to set up," said Ellery thoughtfully, "before the store opens its doors." He glanced at his father.

"You leave Operation Dollie to us, Mr. Bondling," said the Inspector grimly. "Better give me a buzz this afternoon."

The Dauphin's Doll

"I can't tell you, Inspector, how relieved I am——"

"Are you?" said the old gentleman sourly. "What makes you think he won't get it?"

When Attorney Bondling had left, the Queens put their heads together, Ellery doing most of the talking, as usual. Finally, the Inspector went into the bedroom for a session with his direct line to Headquarters.

"Anybody would think," sniffed Nikki, "you two were planning the defence of the Bastille. Who is this Comus, anyway?"

"We don't know, Nikki," said Ellery slowly. "Might be anybody. Began his criminal career about five years ago. He's in the grand tradition of Lupin—a saucy, highly intelligent rascal who's made stealing an art. He seems to take a special delight in stealing valuable things under virtually impossible conditions. Master of make up—he's appeared in a dozen different disguises. And he's an uncanny mimic. Never been caught, photographed, or fingerprinted. Imaginative, daring—I'd say he's the most dangerous thief operating in the United States."

"If he's never been caught," said Nikki sceptically, "how do you know he commits these crimes?"

"You mean: and not someone else?" Ellery smiled pallidly. "The techniques mark the thefts as his work. And then, like Arsène, he leaves a card—with the name 'Comus' on it—on the scene of each visit."

"Does he usually announce in advance that he's going to swipe the crown jewels?"

"No." Ellery frowned. "To my knowledge, this is the first such instance. Since he's never done anything without a reason, that visit to Bondling's office this morning must be part of his greater plan. I wonder if——"

The telephone in the living-room rang clear and loud.

Nikki looked at Ellery. Ellery looked at the telephone.

"Do you suppose——?" began Nikki. But then she said, "Oh, it's too absurd."

"Where Comus is involved," said Ellery wildly, "nothing is too absurd!" and he leaped for the phone. "Hello!"

"A call from an old friend," announced a deep and hollowish male voice. "Comus."

"Well," said Ellery. "Hello again."

"Did Mr. Bondling," asked the voice jovially, "persuade you to 'prevent' me from stealing the Dauphin's Doll in Nash's to-morrow?"

"So you know Bondling's been here."

"No miracle involved, Queen. I followed him. Are you taking the case?"

"See here, Comus," said Ellery. "Under ordinary circumstances I'd welcome the sporting chance to put you where you belong. But these circumstances are not ordinary. That doll represents the major asset of a future fund for orphaned children. I'd rather we didn't play catch with it. Comus, what do you say we call this one off?"

"Shall we say," asked the voice gently, "Nash's Department Store—to-morrow?"

Thus the early morning of December twenty-fourth finds Messrs. Queen and Bondling, and Nikki Porter, huddled on the iron sidewalk of Forty-third Street before the holly-decked windows of the Life Bank and Trust Company, just outside a double line of armed guards. The guards form a channel between the bank entrance and an armoured truck, down which Cytherea Ypson's Dollection flows swiftly. And all about gapes New York, stamping callously on the aged, icy face of the street against the uncharitable Christmas wind.

Now is the winter of his discontent, and Mr. Queen curses.

"I don't know what you're beefing about," moans Miss Porter. "You and Mr. Bondling are bundled up like Yukon prospectors. Look at *me*."

"It's that rat-hearted public relations tripe from Nash's," says Mr. Queen murderously. "They all swore themselves to secrecy, Brother Rat included. Honour! Spirit of Christmas!"

"It was all over the radio last night," whimpers Mr. Bondling. "And in this morning's papers."

"I'll cut his creep's heart out. Here! Velie, keep those people away!"

The Dauphin's Doll

Sergeant Velie says good-naturedly from the doorway of the bank, "You jerks stand back." Little does the Sergeant know the fate in store for him.

"Armoured trucks," says Miss Porter bluishly. "Shotguns."

"Nikki, Comus made a point of informing us in advance that he meant to steal the Dauphin's Doll in Nash's Department Store. It would be just like him to have said that in order to make it easier to steal the doll *en route*."

"Why don't they hurry?" shivers Mr. Bondling. "Ah!"

Inspector Queen appears suddenly in the doorway. His hands clasp treasure.

"Oh!" cries Nikki.

New York whistles.

It is magnificence, an affront to democracy. But street mobs, like children, are royalists at heart.

New York whistles, and Sergeant Thomas Velie steps menacingly before Inspector Queen, Police Positive drawn, and Inspector Queen dashes across the sidewalk between the bristling lines of guards with the Dauphin's Doll in his embrace.

Queen the Younger vanishes, to materialize an instant later at the door of the armoured truck.

"It's just immorally, hideously beautiful, Mr. Bondling," breathes Miss Porter, sparkly-eyed.

Mr. Bondling cranes, thinly.

ENTER *Santa Claus with bell*.

Santa. Oyez, oyez. Peace, good will. Is that the dollie the radio's been yappin' about, folks?

Mr. B. Scram.

Miss P. Why, my Bondling.

Mr. B. Well, he's got no business here. Stand back, er, Santa. Back!

Santa. What eateth you, my lean and angry friend? Have you no compassion at this season of the year?

Mr. B. Oh . . . Here! (*Clink.*) Now will you *kindly* . . . ?

Santa. Mighty pretty dollie. Where they takin' it, girлие?

Miss P. Over to Nash's, Santa.

Ellery Queen

Mr. B. You asked for it. Officer!!!

Santa (*hurriedly*). Little present for you, girly. Compliments of Santa. Merry, merry.

Miss P. For me? (EXIT Santa, *rapidly, with bell.*) Really, Mr. Bondling, was it necessary to . . . ?

Mr. B. Opium for the masses! What did that flatulent faker hand you, Miss Porter? What's in that unmentionable envelope?

Miss P. I'm sure I don't know, but isn't it the most touching idea? Why, it's addressed to Ellery. Oh! Elleryyyyyyy!

Mr. B. (EXIT *excitedly*). Where is he? You——! Officer! Where did that baby-deceiver disappear to? A Santa Claus . . . !

Mr. Q. (*entering on the run*). Yes! Nikki, what is it? What's happened?

Miss P. A man dressed as Santa Claus has just handed me this envelope. It's addressed to you.

Mr. Q. Note? (*He snatches it, withdraws a miserable slice of paper from it on which is block-lettered in pencil a message which he reads aloud with considerable expression.*) "Dear Ellery, Don't you trust me? I said I'd steal the Dauphin in Nash's emporium to-day and that's exactly where I'm going to do it. Yours——" Signed . . .

Miss P. (*craning*). "Comus." That Santa?

Mr. Q. *sets his manly lips. An icy wind blows.*

Even the master had to acknowledge that their defences against Comus were ingenious.

From the Display Department of Nash's they had requisitioned four mitre-jointed counters of uniform length. These they had fitted together, and in the centre of the hollow square thus formed they had erected a platform six feet high. On the counters, in plastic tiers, stretched the long lines of Miss Ypson's babies. Atop the platform, dominant, stood a great chair of hand-carved oak, filched from the Swedish Modern section of the Fine Furniture Department; and on this Valhalla-like throne, a huge and rosy rotundity, sat Sergeant Thomas Velie of Police Headquarters, morosely grateful for the anonymity endowed by the scarlet suit and the jolly mask and whiskers of his appointed role.

The Dauphin's Doll

Nor was this all. At a distance of six feet outside the counters shimmered a surrounding rampart of plate glass, borrowed in its various elements from *The Glass Home of the Future* display on the sixth floor rear, and assembled to shape an eight-foot wall quoined with chrome, its glistening surfaces flawless except at one point, where a thick glass door had been installed. But the edges fitted intimately and there was a formidable lock in the door, the key to which lay buried in Mr. Queen's right trouser pocket.

It was 8.45 a.m. The Queens, Nikki Porter, and Attorney Bondling stood among store officials and an army of plain-clothes men on Nash's main floor surveying the product of their labours.

"I think that about does it," muttered Inspector Queen at last. "Men! Positions around the glass partition."

Twenty-four assorted gendarmes in mufti jostled one another. They took marked places about the wall, facing it and grinning up at Sergeant Velie. Sergeant Velie, from his throne, glared back.

"Hagstrom and Piggott—the door."

Two detectives detached themselves from a group of reserves. As they marched to the glass door, Mr. Bondling plucked at the Inspector's overcoat sleeve. "Can all these men be trusted, Inspector Queen?" he whispered. "I mean, this fellow Comus——"

"Mr. Bondling," replied the old gentleman coldly, "you do your job and let me do mine."

"But——"

"Picked men, Mr. Bondling! I picked 'em myself."

"Yes, yes, Inspector. I merely thought I'd——"

"Lieutenant Farber."

A little man with watery eyes stepped forward.

"Mr. Bondling, this is Lieutenant Geronimo Farber, Headquarters jewellery expert. Ellery?"

Ellery took the Dauphin's Doll from his greatcoat pocket, but he said, "If you don't mind, Dad, I'll keep holding on to it."

Somebody said, "Wow," and then there was silence.

"Lieutenant, this doll in my son's hand is the famous Dauphin's Doll with the diamond crown that——"

"Don't touch it, Lieutenant, please," said Ellery. "I'd rather nobody touched it."

"The doll," continued the Inspector, "has just been brought here from a bank vault which it ought never to have left, and Mr. Bondling, who's handling the Ypson estate, claims it's the genuine article. Lieutenant, examine the diamond and give us your opinion."

Lieutenant Farber produced a *loupe*. Ellery held the Dauphin securely, and Farber did not touch it.

Finally, the expert said, "I can't pass an opinion about the doll itself, of course, but the diamond's a beauty. Easily worth a hundred thousand dollars at the present state of the market—maybe more. Looks like a very strong setting, by the way."

"Thanks, Lieutenant. Okay, son," said the Inspector. "Go into your waltz."

Clutching the Dauphin, Ellery strode over to the glass gate and unlocked it.

"This fellow Farber," whispered Attorney Bondling in the Inspector's hairy ear. "Inspector, are you absolutely sure he's——"

"He's really Lieutenant Farber?" The Inspector controlled himself. "Mr. Bondling, I've known Gerry Farber for eighteen years. Calm yourself."

Ellery was crawling perilously over the nearest counter. Then, bearing the Dauphin aloft, he hurried across the floor of the enclosure to the platform.

Sergeant Velie whined, "Maestro, how in hell am I going to sit here all day without washin' my hands?"

But Mr. Queen merely stooped and lifted from the floor a heavy little structure faced with black velvet consisting of a floor and a backdrop, with a two-armed chromium support. This object he placed on the platform directly between Sergeant Velie's massive legs.

Carefully, he stood the Dauphin's Doll in the velvet niche. Then he clambered back across the counter, went through the glass door, locked it with the key, and turned to examine his handiwork.

Proudly the prince's plaything stood, the jewel in his little golden crown darting "on pale electric streams" under the concentrated tide

The Dauphin's Doll

of a dozen of the most powerful floodlights in the possession of the great store.

"Velie," said Inspector Queen, "you're not to touch that doll. Don't lay a finger on it."

The Sergeant said, "Gaaaaa."

"You men on duty. Don't worry about the crowds. Your job is to keep watching that doll. You're not to take your eyes off it all day. Mr. Bondling, are you satisfied?" Mr. Bondling seemed about to say something, but then he hastily nodded. "Ellery?"

The great man smiled. "The only way he can get that bawbie," he said, "is by well-directed mortar fire or spells and incantations. Raise the portcullis."

Then began the interminable day, *dies irae*, the last shopping day before Christmas. This is traditionally the day of the inert, the procrastinating, the undecided, and the forgetful, sucked at last into the mercantile machine by the perpetual pump of Time. If there is peace upon earth, it descends only afterward; and at no time, on the part of anyone embroiled, is there good will toward men. As Miss Porter expresses it, a cat fight in a bird cage would be more Christian.

But on this December twenty-fourth, in Nash's, the normal bedlam was augmented by the vast shrilling of thousands of children. It may be, as the Psalmist insists, that happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; but no bowmen surrounded Miss Ypson's darlings this day, only detectives carrying revolvers, not a few of whom forbore to use same only by the most heroic self-discipline. In the black floods of humanity overflowing the main floor little folks darted about like electrically charged minnows, pursued by exasperated maternal shrieks and the imprecations of those whose shins and rumps and toes were at the mercy of hot, happy little limbs; indeed, nothing was sacred, and Attorney Bondling was seen to quail and wrap his greatcoat defensively about him against the savage innocence of childhood. But the guardians of the law, having been ordered to simulate store employees, possessed no such armour; and many a man earned his citation that day for unique cause. They

stood in the millrace of the tide; it churned about them, shouting, "Dollies! Dollies!" until the very word lost its familiar meaning and became the insensate scream of a thousand Loreleis beckoning strong men to destruction below the eye-level of their diamond Light.

But they stood fast.

And Comus was thwarted. Oh, he tried. At 11.18 a.m. a tottering old man holding fast to the hand of a small boy tried to wheedle Detective Hagstrom into unlocking the glass door "so my grandson here—he's terrible near-sighted—can get a closer look at the pretty dollies." Detective Hagstrom roared, "Rubel!" and the old gentleman dropped the little boy's hand violently and with remarkable agility lost himself in the crowd. A spot investigation revealed that, coming upon the boy, who had been crying for his mommy, the old gentleman had promised to find her. The little boy, whose name—he said—was Lance Morganstern, was removed to the Lost and Found Department; and everyone was satisfied that the great thief had finally launched his attack. Everyone, that is, but Ellery Queen. He seemed puzzled. When Nikki asked him why, he merely said: "Stupidity, Nikki. It's not in character."

At 1.46 p.m. Sergeant Velie sent up a distress signal. He had, it seemed, to wash his hands. Inspector Queen signalled back: "O.K. Fifteen minutes." Sergeant Santa C. Velie scrambled off his perch, clawed his way over the counter, and pounded urgently on the inner side of the glass door. Ellery let him out, relocking the door immediately, and the Sergeant's red-clad figure disappeared on the double in the general direction of the main-floor gentlemen's relief station, leaving the Dauphin in solitary possession of the dais.

During the Sergeant's recess, Inspector Queen circulated among his men repeating the order of the day.

The episode of Velie's response to the summons of Nature caused a temporary crisis. For at the end of the specified fifteen minutes he had not returned. Nor was there a sign of him at the end of a half-hour. An aide dispatched to the relief station reported back that the Sergeant was not there. Fears of foul play were voiced at an emer-

agency staff conference held then and there and counter-measures were being planned even as, at 2.35 p.m., the familiar Santa-clad bulk of the Sergeant was observed battling through the lines, pawing at his mask.

"Velie," snarled Inspector Queen, "where have you been?"

"Eating my lunch," growled the Sergeant's voice defensively. "I been taking my punishment like a good soldier all this damn day, Inspector, but I draw the line at starvin' to death even in line of duty."

"Velie——!" choked the Inspector; but then he waved his hand feebly and said, "Ellery, let him back in there."

And that was very nearly all. The only other incident of note occurred at 4.22 p.m. A well-upholstered woman with a red face yelled, "Stop! Thief! He grabbed my handbag! Police!" about fifty feet from the Ypson exhibit. Ellery instantly shouted, "*It's a trick, men, don't take your eyes off that doll!*" "It's Comus disguised as a woman," exclaimed Attorney Bondling, as Inspector Queen and Detective Hesse wrestled the female figure through the mob. She was now a wonderful shade of magenta. "What are you *doing?*" she screamed. "Don't arrest *me!*—catch that crook who stole my handbag!" "No dice, Comus," said the Inspector. "Wipe off that make-up." "McComas?" said the woman loudly. "My name is Rafferty, and all these folks saw it. He was a fat man with a moustache." "Inspector," said Nikki Porter, making a surreptitious scientific test. "This is a female. Believe me." And so, indeed, it proved. All agreed that the moustached fat man had been Comus, creating a diversion in the desperate hope that the resulting confusion would give him an opportunity to steal the little Dauphin.

"Stupid, stupid," muttered Ellery, gnawing his fingernails.

"Sure," grinned the Inspector. "We've got him nibbling his tail, Ellery. This was his do-or-die pitch. He's through."

"Frankly," sniffed Nikki, "I'm a little disappointed."

"Worried," said Ellery, "would be the word for me."

Inspector Queen was too case-hardened a sinner's nemesis to lower his guard at his most vulnerable moment. When the 5.30 bells bonged

and the crowds began struggling toward the exits, he barked: "Men, stay at your posts. Keep watching that doll!" So all hands were on the *qui vive* even as the store emptied. The reserves kept hustling people out. Ellery, standing on an Information booth, spotted bottle-necks and waved his arms.

At 5.30 p.m. the main floor was declared out of the battle zone. All stragglers had been herded out. The only persons visible were the refugees trapped by the closing bell on the upper floors, and these were pouring out of elevators and funnelled by a solid line of detectives and accredited store personnel to the doors. By 6.05 they were a trickle; by 6.10 even the trickle had dried up. And the personnel itself began to disperse.

"No, men!" called Ellery sharply from his observation post. "Stay where you are till all the store employees are out!" The counter clerks had long since disappeared.

Sergeant Velie's plaintive voice called from the other side of the glass door. "I got to get home and decorate my tree. Maestro, make with the key."

Ellery jumped down and hurried over to release him. Detective Piggott jeered, "Going to play Santa to your kids to-morrow morning, Velie?" at which the Sergeant managed even through his mask to project a four-letter word distinctly, forgetful of Miss Porter's presence, and stamped off toward the gentlemen's relief station.

"Where you going, Velie?" asked the Inspector, smiling.

"I got to get out of these x-and-dash Santy clothes somewheres, don't I?" came back the Sergeant's mask-muffled tones, and he vanished in a thunderclap of his fellow-officers' laughter.

"Still worried, Mr. Queen?" chuckled the Inspector.

"I don't understand it." Ellery shook his head. "Well, Mr. Bondling, there's your Dauphin, untouched by human hands."

"Yes. Well!" Attorney Bondling wiped his forehead happily. "I don't profess to understand it, either, Mr. Queen. Unless it's simply another case of an inflated reputation . . ." He clutched the Inspector suddenly. "Those men!" he whispered. "*Who are they?*"

"Relax, Mr. Bondling," said the Inspector good-naturedly. "It's

just the men to move the dolls back to the bank. Wait a minute, you men! Perhaps, Mr. Bondling, we'd better see the Dauphin back to the vaults ourselves."

"Keep those fellows back," said Ellery to the Headquarters men quietly, and he followed the Inspector and Mr. Bondling into the enclosure. They pulled two of the counters apart at one corner and strolled over to the platform. The Dauphin was winking at them in a friendly way. They stood looking at him.

"Cute little devil," said the Inspector.

"Seems silly now," beamed Attorney Bondling. "Being so worried all day."

"Comus must have had *some* plan," mumbled Ellery.

"Sure," said the Inspector. "That old man disguise. And that purse-snatching act."

"No, no, Dad. Something clever. He's always pulled something clever."

"Well, there's the diamond," said the lawyer comfortably. "He didn't."

"Disguise . . ." muttered Ellery. "It's always been a disguise. Santa Claus costume—he used that once—this morning in front of the bank . . . Did we see a Santa Claus around here to-day?"

"Just Velie," said the Inspector, grinning. "And I hardly think——"

"Wait a moment, please," said Attorney Bondling in a very odd voice.

He was staring at the Dauphin's Doll.

"Wait for what, Mr. Bondling?"

"What's the matter?" said Ellery, also in a very odd voice.

"But . . . not possible . . ." stammered Bondling. He snatched the doll from its black velvet repository. "No!" he howled. "*This isn't the Dauphin! It's a fake—a copy!*"

Something happened in Mr. Queen's head—a little *click!* like the turn of a switch. And there was light.

"Some of you men!" he roared. "*After Santa Claus!*"

"Who, Mr. Queen?"

"What's he talkin' about?"

"After who, Ellery?" gasped Inspector Queen.

"What's the matter?"

"I dunno!"

"Don't stand here! *Get him!*" screamed Ellery, dancing up and down. "The man I just let out of here! The Santa who made for the men's room!"

Detectives started running, wildly.

"But Ellery," said a small voice, and Nikki found that it was her own, "that was Sergeant Velie."

"It was *not* Velie, Nikki! When Velie ducked out just before two o'clock to relieve himself, *Comus waylaid him!* It was Comus who came back in Velie's Santa Claus rig, wearing Velie's whiskers and mask! *Comus has been on this platform all afternoon!*" He tore the Dauphin from Attorney Bondling's grasp. "Copy . . . ! Somehow he did it, he did it."

"But Mr. Queen," whispered Attorney Bondling, "his voice. He spoke to us . . . in Sergeant Velie's voice."

"Yes, Ellery," Nikki heard herself saying.

"I told you yesterday Comus is a great mimic, Nikki. Lieutenant Farber! Is Farber still here?"

The jewellery expert, who had been gaping from a distance, shook his head as if to clear it and shuffled into the enclosure.

"Lieutenant," said Ellery in a strangled voice. "Examine this diamond . . . I mean, *is it a diamond?*"

Inspector Queen removed his hands from his face and said froggily, "Well, Gerry?"

Lieutenant Farber squinted once through his *loupe*. "The hell you say. It's strass——"

"It's what?" said the Inspector piteously.

"Strass, Dick—lead glass—paste. Beautiful job of imitation—as nice as I've ever seen."

"Lead me to that Santa Claus," whispered Inspector Queen.

But Santa Claus was being led to him. Struggling in the grip of a dozen detectives, his red coat ripped off, his red pants around his ankles, but his whiskery mask still on his face, came a large shouting man.

"But I tell you," he was roaring, "I'm Sergeant Tom Velie! Just take the mask off—that's all!"

"It's a pleasure," growled Detective Hagstrom, trying to break their prisoner's arm, "we're reservin' for the Inspector."

"Hold him, boys," whispered the Inspector. He struck like a cobra. His hand came away with Santa's face.

And there, indeed, was Sergeant Velie.

"Why, it's Velie," said the Inspector wonderingly.

"I only told you that a thousand times," said the Sergeant, folding his great hairy arms across his great hairy chest. "Now who's the so-and-so who tried to bust my arm?" Then he said, "My pants!" and, as Miss Porter turned delicately away, Detective Hagstrom humbly stooped and raised Sergeant Velie's pants.

"Never mind that," said a cold, remote voice.

It was the master himself.

"Yeah?" said Sergeant Velie, hostilely.

"Velie, weren't you attacked when you went to the men's room just before two?"

"Do I look like the attackable type?"

"You did go to lunch? In person?"

"And a lousy lunch it was."

"It was *you* up here among the dolls all afternoon?"

"Nobody else, Maestro. Now, my friends, I want action. Fast patter. What's this all about? Before," said Sergeant Velie softly, "I lose my temper."

While divers Headquarters orators delivered impromptu periods before the silent Sergeant, Inspector Richard Queen spoke:

"Ellery. Son. How in the name of the second sin did he do it?"

"Pa," replied the master, "you've got me."

Deck the hall with boughs of holly, but not if your name is Queen on the evening of a certain December twenty-fourth. If your name is Queen on that lamentable evening you are seated in the living-room of a New York apartment uttering no falalas, but staring miserably into a sombre fire. And you have company. The guest-list is short,

but select. It numbers two, a Miss Porter and a Sergeant Velie, and they are no comfort.

No, no ancient Yuletide carol is being trolled; only the silence sings.

Wail in your crypt, Cytherea Ypson; all was for nought; your little Dauphin's treasure lies not in the empty coffers of the orphans but in the hot clutch of one who took his evil inspiration from a long-crumbled specialist in vanishments.

Speech was spent. Should a wise man utter vain knowledge, and fill his belly with the east wind? He who talks too much commits a sin, says the Talmud. He also wastes his breath; and they had now reached the point of conversation, having exhausted the available supply.

Item: Lieutenant Geronimo Farber of Police Headquarters had examined the diamond in the genuine Dauphin's crown a matter of econds before it was conveyed to its sanctuary in the enclosure. Lieutenant Farber had pronounced the diamond a diamond, and not merely a diamond, but a diamond worth in his opinion over one hundred thousand dollars.

Question: Had Lieutenant Farber lied?

Answer: Lieutenant Farber was (a) a man of probity, tested in a thousand fires, and (b) he was incorruptible. To (a) and (b) Inspector Richard Queen attested violently, swearing by the beard of his personal Prophet.

Question: Had Lieutenant Farber been mistaken?

Answer: Lieutenant Farber was a nationally famous police expert in the field of precious stones. It must be presumed that he knew a real diamond from a piece of lapidified glass.

Question: Had it been Lieutenant Farber?

Answer: By the same beard of the identical Prophet, it had been Lieutenant Farber and no facsimile.

Conclusion: The diamond Lieutenant Farber had examined immediately preceding the opening of Nash's doors that morning had been the veritable diamond of the Dauphin, the doll had been the veritable Dauphin's Doll, and it was this genuine article which Ellery with his own hands had carried into the glass-enclosed fortress

and deposited between the authenticated Sergeant Velie's verified feet.

Item: All day—specifically, between the moment the Dauphin had been deposited in his niche until the moment he was discovered to be a fraud; that is, during the total period in which a theft-and-substitution was even theoretically possible—no person whatsoever, male or female, adult or child, had set foot within the enclosure except Sergeant Thomas Velie, *alias* Santa Claus.

Question: Had Sergeant Velie switched dolls, carrying the genuine Dauphin concealed in his Santa Claus suit, to be cached for future retrieval or turned over to Comus or a confederate of Comus's, during one of his two departures from the enclosure?

*Answer (by Sergeant Velie):**

Confirmation: Some dozens of persons with police training and specific instructions, not to mention the Queens themselves, Miss Porter, and Attorney Bondling, testified unqualifiedly that Sergeant Velie had not touched the doll, at any time, all day.

Conclusion: Sergeant Velie could not have stolen, and therefore he did not steal, the Dauphin's Doll.

Item: All those deputized to watch the doll swore that they had done so without lapse or hindrance the everlasting day; moreover, that at no time had anything touched the doll—human or mechanical—either from inside or outside the enclosure.

Question: The human vessel being frail, could those so swearing have been in error? Could their attention have wandered through weariness, boredom, *et cetera*?

Answer: Yes; but not all at the same time, by the laws of probability. And during the only two diversions of the danger period, Ellery himself testified that he had kept his eyes on the Dauphin and that nothing whatsoever had approached or threatened it.

Item: Despite all of the foregoing, at the end of the day they had found the real Dauphin gone and a worthless copy in its place.

"It's brilliantly, unthinkably clever," said Ellery at last. "A master illusion. For, of course, it *was* an illusion . . ."

"Witchcraft," groaned the Inspector.

* Deleted—Editor.

Ellery Queen

"Mass mesmerism," suggested Nikki Porter.

"Mass bird-gravel," growled the Sergeant.

Two hours later Ellery spoke again.

"So Comus had a worthless copy of the Dauphin all ready for the switch," he muttered. "It's a world-famous dollie, been illustrated countless times, minutely described, photographed . . . All ready for the switch, but how did he make it? How? How?"

"You said that," said the Sergeant, "once or forty-two times."

"The bells are tolling," sighed Nikki, "but for whom? Not for us." And indeed, while they slumped there, Time, which Seneca named father of truth, had crossed the threshold of Christmas; and Nikki looked alarmed, for as that glorious song of old came upon the midnight clear, a great light spread from Ellery's eyes and beautified the whole contorted countenance, so that peace sat there, the peace that approximath understanding; and he threw back that noble head and laughed with the merriment of an innocent child.

"Hey," said Sergeant Velie, staring.

"Son," began Inspector Queen, half-rising from his armchair when the telephone rang.

"Beautiful!" roared Ellery. "Oh, exquisite! How did Comus make the switch, eh? Nikki——"

"From somewhere," said Nikki, handing him the telephone receiver, "a voice is calling, and if you ask me it's saying 'Comus'. Why not ask him?"

"Comus," whispered the Inspector, shrinking.

"Comus," echoed the Sergeant, baffled.

"Comus?" said Ellery heartily. "How nice. Hello there! Congratulations."

"Why, thank you," said the familiar deep and hollow voice. "I called to express my appreciation for a wonderful day's sport and to wish you the merriest kind of Yuletide."

"You anticipate a rather merry Christmas yourself, I take it."

"*Laeti triumphantes*," said Comus jovially.

"And the orphans?"

"They have my best wishes. But I won't detain you, Ellery. If you'll look at the doormat outside your apartment door, you'll find

on it—in the spirit of the season—a little gift, with the compliments of Comus. Will you remember me to Inspector Queen and Attorney Bondling?”

Ellery hung up, smiling.

On the doormat he found the true Dauphin's Doll, intact except for a contemptible detail. The jewel in the little golden crown was missing.

“It was,” said Ellery later over pastrami sandwiches, “a fundamentally simple problem. All great illusions are. A valuable object is placed in full view in the heart of an impenetrable enclosure, it is watched hawkishly by dozens of thoroughly screened and reliable trained persons, it is never out of their view, it is not once touched by human hand or any other agency, and yet, at the expiration of the danger period it is gone—exchanged for a worthless copy. Wonderful. Amazing. It defies the imagination. Actually, it's susceptible—like all magical hocus-pocus—to immediate solution if only one is able—as I was not—to ignore the wonder and stick to the fact. But then, the wonder is there for precisely that purpose: to stand in the way of the fact.

“What is the fact?” continued Ellery, helping himself to a dill pickle. “The fact is that between the time the doll was placed on the exhibit platform and the time the theft was discovered no one and no thing touched it. Therefore between the time the doll was placed on the platform and the time the theft was discovered *the Dauphin could not have been stolen*. It follows, simply and inevitably, that the Dauphin must have been stolen *outside that period*.

“Before the period began? No. I placed the authentic Dauphin inside the enclosure with my own hands; at or about the beginning of the period, then, no hand but mine had touched the doll—not even, you'll recall, Lieutenant Farber's.

“Then the Dauphin must have been stolen after the period closed.”

Ellery brandished half the pickle. “And who,” he demanded solemnly, “is the only one besides myself who handled that doll after the period closed and before Lieutenant Farber pronounced the diamond to be paste? The only one?”

The Inspector and the Sergeant exchanged puzzled glances, and Nikki looked blank.

"Why, Mr. Bondling," said Nikki, "and he doesn't count."

"He counts very much, Nikki," said Ellery, reaching for the mustard, "because the facts say Bondling stole the Dauphin at that time."

"Bondling!" The Inspector paled.

"I don't get it," complained Sergeant Velie.

"Ellery, you must be wrong," said Nikki. "At the time Mr. Bondling grabbed the doll off the platform, the theft had already taken place. It was the worthless copy he picked up."

"That," said Ellery, reaching for another sandwich, "was the focal point of his illusion. How do we know it was the worthless copy he picked up? Why, he said so. Simple, eh? He said so, and like the dumb bunnies we were, we took his unsupported word as gospel."

"That's right!" mumbled his father. "We didn't actually examine the doll till quite a few seconds later."

"Exactly," said Ellery in a munchy voice. "There was a short period of beautiful confusion, as Bondling knew there would be. I yelled to the boys to follow and grab Santa Claus—I mean, the Sergeant here. The detectives were momentarily demoralized. You, Dad, were stunned. Nikki looked as if the roof had fallen in. I essayed an excited explanation. Some detectives ran; others milled around. And while all this was happening—during those few moments when nobody was watching the genuine doll in Bondling's hand because everyone thought it was a fake—Bondling calmly slipped it into one of his greatcoat pockets and from the other produced the worthless copy which he'd been carrying there all day. When I did turn back to him, it was the copy I grabbed from his hand. And his illusion was complete.

"I know," said Ellery dryly. "It's rather on the let-down side. That's why illusionists guard their professional secrets so closely; knowledge is disenchantment. No doubt the incredulous amazement aroused in his periwigged London audience by Comus the French conjuror's dematerialization of his wife from the top of a table would have suffered the same fate if he'd revealed the trap door through

The Dauphin's Doll

which she had dropped. A good trick, like a good woman, is best in the dark. Sergeant, have another pastrami."

"Seems like funny chow to be eating early Christmas morning," said the Sergeant, reaching. Then he stopped. Then he said, "Bondling," and shook his head.

"Now that we know it was Bondling," said the Inspector, who had recovered a little, "it's a cinch to get that diamond back. He hasn't had time to dispose of it yet. I'll just give downtown a buzz——"

"Wait, Dad," said Ellery.

"Wait for what?"

"Whom are you going to sick the dogs on?"

"What?"

"You're going to call Headquarters, get a warrant, and so on. Who's your man?"

The Inspector felt his head. "Why . . . Bondling, didn't you say?"

"It might be wise," said Ellery, thoughtfully searching with his tongue for a pickle seed, "to specify his *alias*."

"*Alias*?" said Nikki. "Does he have one?"

"What *alias*, son?"

"Comus."

"*Comus*!"

"*Comus*?"

"Comus."

"Oh, come off it," said Nikki, pouring herself a shot of coffee, straight, for she was in training for the Inspector's Christmas dinner. "How could Bondling be Comus when Bondling was with us all day?—and Comus kept making disguised appearances all over the place . . . that Santa who gave me the note in front of the bank—the old man who kidnapped Lance Morganstern—the fat man with the moustache who snatched Mrs. Rafferty's purse."

"Yeah," said the Sergeant. "How?"

"These illusions die hard," said Ellery. "Wasn't it Comus who phoned a few minutes ago to rag me about the theft? Wasn't it Comus who said he'd left the stolen Dauphin—minus the diamond—on our doormat? Therefore Comus is Bondling."

"I told you Comus never does anything without a good reason,"

said Ellery. "Why did 'Comus' announce to 'Bondling' that he was *going* to steal the Dauphin's Doll? Bondling told us that—putting the finger on his *alter ego*—because he wanted us to believe he and Comus were separate individuals. He wanted us to watch for *Comus* and take *Bondling* for granted. In tactical execution of this strategy, Bondling provided us with three 'Comus'-appearances during the day—obviously, confederates.

"Yes," said Ellery, "I think, Dad, you'll find on backtracking that the great thief you've been trying to catch for five years has been a respectable estate attorney on Park Row all the time, shedding his quiddities and his quilllets at night in favour of the soft shoe and the dark lantern. And now he'll have to exchange them all for a number and a grilled door. Well, well, it couldn't have happened at a more appropriate season; there's an old English proverb that says the Devil makes his Christmas pie of lawyer's tongues. Nikki, pass the pastrami."

Who Killed Baker?

EDMUND CRISPIN AND GEOFFREY BUSH

Wakefield was attending a series of philosophy lectures at London University, and for the past ten minutes his fellow-guests at Haldane's had been mutely enduring a *précis* of the lecturer's main contentions.

"What it amounts to, then," said Wakefield, towards what they hoped was the close of what they hoped was his peroration, "is that philosophy deals not so much with the answers to questions about Man and the Universe as with the problem of *what questions may properly be asked*. Improper questions"—here a little man named Fielding, whom no one knew very well, choked suddenly over his port and had to be led out—"improper questions can only confuse the issue. And it's this aspect of philosophy which in my opinion defines its superiority to other studies, such as—such as"—Wakefield's eye lighted on Gervase Fen, who was stolidly cracking walnuts opposite—"such as, well, criminology, for instance."

Fen roused himself.

"Improper questions," he said reflectively. "I remember a case which illustrates very clearly how——"

"Defines," Wakefield repeated at a higher pitch, "its superiority to——"

But at this point, Haldane, perceiving that much more of Wakefield on epistemology would certainly bring the party to a premature end, contrived adroitly to upset his port into Wakefield's lap, and in the *mêlée* which ensued it proved possible to detach the conversational initiative from Wakefield and confer it on Fen.

"*Who killed Baker?*" With this rather abrupt query Fen established a foothold while Wakefield was still scrubbing ineffectually at his damp trousers with a handkerchief. "The situation which resulted in Baker's death wasn't in itself specially complicated or obscure, and in consequence the case was solved readily enough."

"Yes, it would be, of course," said Wakefield sourly, "if you were solving it."

"Oh, but I wasn't." Fen shook his head decisively, and Wakefield, shifting about uncomfortably in the effort to remove wet barathra from contact with his skin, glowered at him. "The case was solved by a very able Detective-Inspector of the County C.I.D., by name Casby, and it was from him that I heard of it, quite recently, while we were investigating the death of that Swiss schoolmaster at Cotten Abbas. As nearly as I can, I'll tell it to you the way he told me. And I ought to warn you in advance that it's a case in which the mode of telling is important—as important, probably, as the thing told. . . .

"At the time of his death Baker was about forty-five, a self-important little man with very black, heavily-brilliantined hair, an incipient paunch, dandified clothes, and a twisted bruiser's nose which was the consequence not of pugnacity but of a fall from a bicycle in youth. He was not, one gathers, at all a pleasing personality, and he had crowned his dislikeable qualities by marrying, and subsequently bullying, a wife very much younger and more attractive than himself. For a reason which the sequel will make obvious, there's not much evidence as to the form this bullying took, but it was real enough—no question about that—and three years of it drove the wretched woman, more for consolation than for passion, into the arms of the chauffeur, a gloomy, sallow young man named Arnold Snow. Since Snow had never read D. H. Lawrence, his chief emotion in the face of Mary Baker's advances was simple surprise, and to do him justice, he seems never to have made the smallest attempt to capitalize his position in any of the obvious ways. But, of course, the neighbours talked; there are precedents enough for such a relationship's ending in disaster."

Haldane nodded. "Rattenbury," he suggested, "and Stoner."

"That sort of thing, yes. It wasn't a very sensible course for Mary Baker to adopt, the more so as for religious reasons she had a real horror of divorce. But she was one of those warm, good-natured, muddle-headed women—not, in temperament, unlike Mrs. Rattenbury—to whom a man's affection is overwhelmingly necessary, as much for emotional as for physical reasons; and three years of Baker had starved that side of her so effectively that when she did break out, she broke out with a vengeance. I've seen a photograph of her, and can tell you that she was rather a big woman (though not fat), as dark as her husband or her lover, with a large mouth and eyes, and a Rubensish figure. Why she married Baker in the first place I really can't make out. He was well-to-do—or anyway seemed so—but Mary was the sort of woman to whom money quite genuinely means nothing; and oddly enough, Snow seems to have been as indifferent to it as she.

"Baker was a manufacturer. His factory just outside Twelford made expensive model toys—ships, aeroplanes, cars, and so forth. The demand for such things is strictly limited—people who know the value of money very properly hesitate before spending fifteen guineas on a toy which their issue are liable to sit on, or drop into a pond, an hour later—and when Philip Eckerson built a factory in Ruislip for producing the same sort of thing, only more cheaply, Baker's profits dropped with some abruptness to rather less than half what they'd been before. So for five years there was a price-war—a price-war beneficial to the country's nurseries, but ruinous to Baker and Eckerson alike. When eventually they met, to arrange a merger, both of them were close to bankruptcy.

"It was on March 10th of this year that they met—not on neutral territory, but in Baker's house at Twelford, where Eckerson was to stay the night. Eckerson was an albino, which is uncommon, but apart from that the only remarkable thing about him was obstinacy, and since he confined this trait to business, the impression he made on Mary Baker during his visit to her house was in every respect colourless. She was aware, in a vague, general way, that he was her husband's business rival, but she bore him not the least malice on that account; and as to Snow, the mysteries of finance were beyond

him, and from first to last he never understood how close to the rocks his employer's affairs had drifted. In any case, neither he nor Mary Baker had much attention to spare for Eckerson, because an hour or two before Eckerson arrived Baker summoned the pair of them to his study, informed them that he knew of their liaison, and stated that he would take steps immediately to obtain a divorce.

"It's doubtful, I think, if he really intended to do anything of the kind. He didn't sack Snow, he didn't order his wife out of the house, and apparently he had no intention of leaving the house himself—all of which would amount, in law, to condoning his wife's adultery and nullifying the suit. No, he was playing cat-and-mouse, that was all; he knew his wife's horror of divorce, and wished quite simply to make her miserable for as long as the pretence of proceedings could be kept up; but neither Mary nor Snow had the wit to see that he was duping them for his own pleasure, and they assumed in consequence that he meant every word he said. Mary became hysterical—in which condition she confided her obsession about divorce to Snow. And Snow, a remarkably naïve and impressionable young man, took it all *au grand sérieux*. He had not, up to now, displayed any notable animus against Baker, but Mary's terror and wretchedness fanned hidden fires, and from then on he was implacable. They were a rather pitiful pair, these two young people cornered by an essentially rather trivial issue, but their very ignorance made them dangerous, and if Baker had had more sense he'd never have played such an imbecile trick on them. Psychologically, he was certainly in a morbid condition, for apparently he was prepared to let the relationship go on, provided he could indulge his sadistic instincts in this weird and preposterous fashion. What the end of it all would have been, if death hadn't intervened, one doesn't, of course, know.

"Well, in due course Eckerson arrived, and Mary entertained him as well as her emotional condition would allow, and he sat up with Baker till the small hours, talking business. The two men antagonized one another from the start; and the more they talked, the more remote did the prospect of a merger become, until in the latter

stages all hope of it vanished, and they went to their beds on the very worst of terms, with nothing better to look forward to than an extension of their present cut-throat competition, and eventual ruin. You'd imagine that self-interest would be strong enough, in a case like that, to compel them to some sort of agreement, but it wasn't—and of course the truth of the matter is that each was hoping that, if competition continued, the other would crack first, leaving a clear field. So they parted on the landing with mutual, and barely concealed, ill-will; and the house slept.

"The body was discovered shortly after nine next morning, and the discoverer was Mrs. Blaine, the cook. Unlike Snow, who lived in, Mrs. Blaine had a bed-sitting-room in the town; and it was as she was making her way round to the back door of Baker's house, to embark on the day's duties, that she glanced in at the drawing-room window and saw the gruesome object which lay in shadow on the hearth-rug. Incidentally, you mustn't waste any of your energy suspecting Mrs. Blaine of the murder; I can assure you she had nothing to do with it, and I can assure you, too, that her evidence, for what little it was worth, was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. . . .

"Mrs. Blaine looked in at the window, and her first thought, to use her own words, 'was that 'e'd fainted'. But the streaks of blood on the corpse's hair disabused her of this notion without much delay, and she hurried indoors to rouse the household. Well, in due course Inspector Casby arrived, and in due course assembled such evidence as there was. The body lay prone on a rug soaked with dark venous blood, and the savage cut which had severed the internal jugular vein had obviously come from behind, and been wholly unexpected. Nearby, and innocent of fingerprints, lay the sharp kitchen knife which had done the job. Apart from these things, there was no clue.

"No clue, that is, of a positive sort. But there *had* been an amateurish attempt to make the death look like a consequence of burglary—or rather, to be more accurate, of housebreaking. The pane of a window had been broken, with the assistance of flypaper to prevent the fragments from scattering, and a number of valuables were

missing. But the breakfast period is not a time usually favoured by thieves, there were no footprints or marks of any kind on the damp lawn and flower bed beneath the broken window (which was not, by the way, the window through which Mrs. Blaine had looked, but another, at right angles to it, on a different side of the house), and finally—and in Inspector Casby's opinion, most conclusive of all—one of the objects missing was a tiny but very valuable bird-study by the Chinese emperor Hui Tsung, which Baker, no connoisseur or collector of such things, had inherited from a great-uncle. The ordinary thief, Casby argued, would scarcely give a Chinese miniature a second glance, let alone remove it. No, the burglary was bogus; and unless you postulated an implausibly sophisticated double-bluff, then the murder had been done by one of the three people sleeping in the house. As to motive—well, you know all about that already; and one way and another it didn't take Inspector Casby more than twenty-four hours to make his arrest."

Somewhat grudgingly, Fen relinquished the walnuts and applied himself to stuffed dates instead. His mouth full, he looked at the company expectantly; and with equal expectancy the company looked back at him. It was Wakefield who broke the silence.

"But that can't be *all*," he protested.

"Certainly it's all," said Fen. "I've told you the story as Inspector Casby told it to me, and I now repeat the question he asked me at the end of it—and which I was able to answer, by the way: *Who killed Baker?*"

Wakefield stared mistrustfully. "You've left something out."

"Nothing, I assure you. If anything, I've been rather more generous with clues than Inspector Casby was. But if you still have no idea who killed Baker, I'll give you another hint: he died at 9 a.m. Does that help?"

They thought about this. Apparently it didn't help in the least.

"All right," Wakefield said sulkily at last. "We give up. Who killed Baker?"

And Fen replied blandly, "The public executioner killed him—after he had been tried and convicted for the murder of Eckerson."

Who Killed Baker?

For a moment Wakefield sat like one stupefied; then he emitted a howl of rage. "Unfair!" he shouted, banging on the table. "Trickery!"

"Not at all." Fen was unperturbed. "It's a trick story, admittedly, but you were given ample warning of that. It arose out of a discussion about the propriety of asking certain questions; and there was only one question—*Who killed Baker?*—which I asked. What's more, I emphasized at the outset that the mode of telling was as important as the thing told.

"But quite apart from all that, you had your clue. Mrs. Blaine, looking in through a window at a figure lying in shadow, concluded that violence had been done for the reason that she saw blood on the hair. Now that blood, as I mentioned, was dark venous blood; and I mentioned also that Baker had black, heavily-brilliantined hair. Is it conceivable that dark blood would be *visible* on such hair—visible, that is, when the body was in shadow and the observer outside the window of the room in which it lay? Of course not. Therefore, the body was not Baker's. But it couldn't have been Mary Baker's, or Snow's, since they too were black-haired—and that leaves only Eckerson. Eckerson was an albino, which means that his hair was white; and splotches of blood would show up on white hair all right—even though it was in shadow, and Mrs. Blaine some distance away. Who, then, would want to kill Eckerson? Baker, obviously, and Baker alone—I emphasized that both Snow and Mary were quite indifferent to the visitor. And who, after the arrest, would be likely to kill (notice, please, that I never at any time said 'murder') Baker? There's only one possible answer to that. . . ."

"And what happened to the wife?" Haldane asked. "Did she marry Snow?"

"No. He melted", said Fen complacently, "away. She married someone else, though, and according to Inspector Casby is very happy now. Baker's and Eckerson's businesses both collapsed under heavy debts, and no longer exist."

There was a pause; then: "The nature of existence", said Wakefield suddenly, "has troubled philosophers in all ages. What are the sensory and mental processes which cause us to assert that this table,

for instance, is *real*? The answer given by the subjective idealists——”

“Will have to wait,” said Haldane firmly, “till we meet again.” He pushed back his chair. “Let’s go and see what the women are up to, shall we?”

You Can't Hang Twice

ANTHONY GILBERT

The mist that had been creeping up from the river during the early afternoon had thickened into a grey blanket of fog by twilight, and by the time Big Ben was striking nine and people all over England were turning on their radio sets for the news, it was so dense that Arthur Crook, opening the window of his office at 123 Bloomsbury Street and peering out, felt that he was poised over chaos. Not a light, not an outline, was visible; below him, the darkness was like a pit. Only his sharp ears caught, faint and far away the uncertain footfall of a benighted pedestrian and the muffled hooting of a motorist ill-advised enough to be caught abroad by the weather.

"An ugly night," reflected Arthur Crook, staring out over the invisible city. "As bad a night as I remember." He shut the window down. "Still," he added, turning back to the desk where he had been working for the past twelve hours, "it all makes for employment. Fogs mean work for the doctor, for the ambulance driver, for the police and the mortician, for the daring thief and the born wrong 'un."

Yes, and work, too, for men like Arthur Crook, who catered specially for the lawless and the reckless and who was known in two continents as the Criminals' Hope and the Judges' Despair.

And even as these thoughts passed through his mind, the driver was waiting, unaware of what the night was to hold, the victim crept out under cover of darkness from the rabbit-hutch-cum-bath that he called his flat, and his enemy watched unseen but close at hand.

In his office, Mr. Crook's telephone began to ring.

The voice at the other end of the line seemed a long way off, as though that also were muffled by the fog, but Crook, whose knowledge of men was wide and who knew them in all moods, realized that the fellow was ridden by fear.

"Honest, he shuddered so he nearly shook me off the line," he told Bill Parsons next day. "It's a wonder a chap like that hasn't died of swallowing his own teeth."

"Mr. Crook," whispered the voice and he heard the pennies fall as the speaker pressed Button A. "I was afraid it would be too late to find you. . . ."

"When I join the forty-hour-a-week campaign I'll let the world know," said Crook affably. "I'm one of those chaps you read about. Time doesn't mean a thing to me. And in a fog like this it might just as well be nine o'clock in the morning as nine o'clock at night."

"It's the fog that makes it possible for me to call you at all," said the voice mysteriously. "You see, in the dark, one hopes he isn't watching."

Hell, thought Crook disappointedly. Just another case of persecution mania, but he said patiently enough, "What is it? Someone on your tail?"

His correspondent seemed sensitive to his change of mood. "You think I'm imagining it? I wish to Heaven I were. But it's not just that I'm convinced I'm being followed. Already he's warned me three times. The last time was to-night."

"How does he warn you?"

"He rings up my flat and each time he says the same thing. 'Is that you, Smyth? Remember—silence is golden'; and then he rings off again."

"On my Sam," exclaimed Crook, "I've heard of better gags at a kids' party. Who is your joking friend?"

"I don't know his name," said the voice, and now it sounded further away than ever, "but—he's the man who strangled Isobel Baldry."

Everyone knows about quick-change artists, how they come on to the stage in a cutaway coat and polished boots, bow, go off and before

You Can't Hang Twice

you can draw your breath they're back in tinsel tights and tinfoil halo. You can't think how it can be done in the time, but no quick-change artist was quicker than Mr. Crook when he heard that. He became a totally different person in the space of a second.

"Well, now we are going places," he said, and his voice was as warm as a fire that's just been switched on. "What did you say your name was?"

"Smyth."

"If that's the way you want it . . ."

"I don't. I'd have liked a more distinguished name. I did the best I could spelling it with a Y, but it hasn't helped much. I was one of the guests at the party that night. You don't remember, of course. I'm not the sort of man people do remember. She didn't. When I came to her house that night she thought I'd come to check the meter or something. She'd never expected me to turn up. She'd just said, 'You must come in one evening. I'm always at home on Fridays,' and I thought she just meant two or three people at most. . . ."

"*Tête-à-tête* with a tigress," said Crook. "What are you, anyhow? A lion-tamer?"

"I work for a legal firm called Wilson, Wilson and Wilson. I don't know if it was always like that on Fridays, but the house seemed full of people when I arrived and—they were all the wrong people, wrong for me, I mean. They were quite young and most of them were either just demobilized or were waiting to come out. Even the doctor had been in the Air Force. They all stared at me as if I had got out of a cage. I heard one say, 'He looks as if he had been born in a bowler hat and striped p-pants.' They just thought I was a joke."

And not much of one at that, thought Mr. Crook unsympathetically.

"But as it happens, the joke's on them," continued the voice, rising suddenly. "Because I'm the only one who knows that Tom Merlin isn't guilty."

"Well, I know," Mr. Crook offered mildly, "because I'm defendin' him, and I only work for the innocent. And the young lady knows or she wouldn't have hauled me into this—the young lady he's going to marry, I mean. And, of course, the real murderer knows. So that

makes four of us. Quite a team, in fact. Suppose you tell us how you know?"

"Because I was behind the curtain when *he* came out of the Turret Room. He passed me so close I could have touched him, though, of course, I couldn't see him because the whole house was dark, because of this game they were playing, the one called Murder. I didn't know then that a crime had been committed, but when the truth came out I realized he must have come out of the room where she was, because there was no other place he could have come from."

"Look," said Mr. Crook. "Just suppose I've never heard this story before." And probably he hadn't heard this one, he reflected. "Start from page one and just go through to the end. For one thing, why were you behind the curtain?"

"I was hiding—not because of the game, but because I—oh, I was so miserable. I ought never to have gone. It wasn't my kind of party. No one paid any attention to me except to laugh when I did anything wrong. If it hadn't been for Mr. Merlin, I wouldn't even have had a drink. And he was just sorry for me. I heard him say to the doctor, 'Isobel ought to remember everyone's human,' and the doctor—Dr. Dunn—said, 'It's a bit late in the day to expect that.'"

"Sounds a dandy party," said Crook.

"It was—terrible. I couldn't understand why all the men seemed to be in love with her. But they were. She wasn't specially good-looking, but they behaved as though there was something about her that made everyone else unimportant."

Crook nodded over the head of the telephone. That was the dead woman's reputation. A courtesan *manquée*—that's how the Press had described her. Born in the right period, she'd have been a riot. As it was, she didn't do so badly, even in 1945.

"It had been bad enough before," the voice went on. "We'd had charades, and of course I'm no good at that sort of thing. The others were splendid. One or two of them were real actors on the stage, and even the others seemed to have done amateur theatricals half their lives. And how they laughed at me—till they got bored because I was so stupid. They stopped after a time, though I offered to drop out and just be audience; and then I wanted to go back, but Miss

Baldry said how could I when she was three miles from a station and no one else was going yet? I could get a lift later. Murder was just as bad as the rest, worse in a way, because it was dark, and you never knew who you might bump into. I bumped right into her and Tom Merlin once. He was telling her she better be careful, one of these days she'd get her neck broken, and she laughed and said, 'Would you like to do it, Tom?' And then she laughed still more and asked him if he was still thinking of that dreary little number—that's what she called her—he'd once thought he might marry. And asked him why he didn't go back, if he wanted to? It was most uncomfortable. I got away and found a window on to the flat roof, what they call the leads. I thought I'd stay there till the game was over. But I couldn't rest even there, because after a minute Mr. Merlin came out in a terrible state, and I was afraid of being seen, so I crept round in the shadows and came into the house through another window. And that's how I found myself in the Turret Room."

"Quite the little Lord Fauntleroy touch," observed Crook admiringly. "Well?"

"Though, of course, all the lights were out, the moon was quite bright and I could see the blue screen and I heard a sound and I guessed Miss Baldry was hidden there. For a minute I thought I'd go across and find her and win the game, but another second and I realized that she wasn't alone, there was someone—a man—with her."

"But you don't know who?"

"No."

"Tough," said Crook. "Having a good time, were they?"

"I don't know about a good time. I think the fact is everyone had been drinking rather freely, and they were getting excited, and I never liked scenes—I haven't a very strong stomach, I'm afraid—so I thought I'd get out. They were so much engrossed in one another—'You have it coming to you, Isobel'—I heard him say. I got out without them hearing me—I did fire-watching, you know, and one learns to move quietly."

"Quite right," assented Crook. "No sense startling a bomb. Well?"

"I went down a little flight of stairs and on to a landing, and I

thought I heard feet coming up, so I got behind the curtain. I was terrified someone would discover me, but the feet went down again and I could hear whispers and laughter—everything you'd expect at a party. They were all enjoying themselves except me."

"And Isobel, of course," suggested Crook.

"She had been—till then. Well, I hadn't been behind the curtain for very long when the door of the Turret Room shut very gently, and someone came creeping down. He stopped quite close to me as if he were leaning over the staircase making sure no one would see him come down. I scarcely dared breathe—though, of course, I didn't know then there had been a murder—and after a minute I heard him go down. The next thing I heard was someone coming up, quickly, and going up the stairs and into the Turret Room. I was just getting ready to come out when I heard a man calling, 'Norman! Norman! For Pete's sake . . .' and Dr. Dunn—he was the R.A.F. doctor, but of course, you know that—called out, 'I'm coming. Where are you?' And the first man—it was Andrew Tatham, the actor, who came out of the Army after Dunkirk—said, 'Keep the women out. An appalling thing's happened.'"

"And, of course, the women came surgin' up like the sea washin' round Canute's feet?"

"A lot of people came up, and I came out from my hiding-place and joined them, but the door of the Turret Room was shut, and after a minute Mr. Tatham came out and said, 'We'd better all go down. There's been an accident.' And Dr. Dunn joined him and said, 'What's the use of telling them that? They'll have to know the truth. Isobel's been murdered, and we're all in a spot.'"

"And when did it strike you that you had something to tell the police?" inquired Crook drily.

"Not straight away. I—I was very shocked myself. Everyone began to try and remember where they'd been, but, of course, in the dark no one could really prove anything. I said I was behind that curtain. I wasn't really playing, but no one listened. I might have been the invisible man. And then one of the girls said, 'Where's Tom?' and Mr. Tatham said, 'That's queer. Hope to Heaven he hasn't been murdered, too.' But he hadn't, of course. He joined us after a minute

and said, 'A good time being had by all?' and one of the girls, the one they call Phœbe, went into hysterics. Then Mr. Tatham said, 'Where on earth have you been?' and he said he was on the leads. He wasn't playing either. They all looked either surprised or—a bit disbelieving, and Dr. Dunn said, 'But if you were on the leads you must have heard something,' and he said, 'Only the usual row. Why? Have we had a murder?' And Mr. Tatham said, 'Stop it, you fool.' And then he began to stare at all of us, and said, 'Tell me, what is it? Why are you looking like that?' So then they told him. Some of them seemed to think he must have heard noises, but Dr. Dunn said that if whoever was responsible knew his onions there needn't be enough noise to attract a man at the farther end of the flat roof, particularly as he'd expect to hear a good deal of movement and muttering and so on."

"And when the police came—did you remember to tell them about the chap who'd come out of the Turret Room; or did you have some special reason for keeping it dark?"

"I—I'm afraid I rather lost my head. You see, I was planning exactly what I'd say when it occurred to me that nobody else had admitted going into that room at all, and I hadn't an atom of proof that my story was true, and—it isn't as if I knew who the man was . . ."

"You know," said Crook, "it looks like I'll be holding your baby when I'm through with Tom Merlin's."

"I didn't see I could do any good," protested Mr. Smyth. "And then they arrested Mr. Merlin and I couldn't keep silent any longer. Because it seemed to me that though I couldn't tell them the name of the murderer or even prove that Mr. Merlin was innocent, a jury wouldn't like to bring in a verdict of guilty when they heard what I had to say."

"Get this into your head," said Crook, sternly. "They won't bring in a verdict of guilty in any circumstances. I'm lookin' after Tom Merlin, so he won't be for the high jump this time. But all the same, you and me have got to get together. Just where do you say you are?"

"On the Embankment—in a call box."

"Well, what's wrong with you coming along right now?"

"In this fog?"

"I thought you said the fog made it safer."

"Safer to telephone, because the box is quite near my flat." He broke suddenly into a queer convulsive giggle. "Though as a matter of fact I began to think the stars in their courses were against me, when I found I only had one penny. Luckily, there was one in my pocket—I keep one there for an evening paper . . ."

"Keep that bit for your memoirs," Crook begged him. "Now all you've got to do is proceed along the Embankment. . . ."

"The trams have stopped."

"Don't blame 'em," said Crook.

"And I don't know about the trains, but I wouldn't dare travel by Underground in this weather, and though I think there was one taxi a little while ago . . ."

"Listen!" said Crook. "You walk like I told you till you come to Charing Cross. You can't fall off the Embankment and if there's no traffic nothing can run you down. The tubes are all right, and from Charing Cross to Russell Square is no way at all. Change at Leicester Square. Got that? You can be in my office within twenty-five minutes. I'm only three doors from the station, and anyone will tell you my address. I'm better known after dark than any house in London, bar none."

"Wouldn't to-morrow . . .?" began Smyth, but Crook said, "Not it. You might have had another warning by to-morrow and this time it might be a bit more lethal than an anonymous telephone message. Now, don't lose heart. It's like going to the dentist. Once it's done, it's over for six months. So long as X. thinks you're huggin' your guilty secret to your own buzzoom you're a danger to him. Once you've spilt the beans you're safe."

"It's a long way to Charing Cross," quavered the poor little rabbit.

"No way at all," Crook assured him. "And never mind about the trams and the taxicabs. You might be safer on your own feet at that."

Thus is many a true word spoken in jest.

"And now," ruminated Mr. Crook, laying the telephone aside and

looking at the great potbellied watch he drew from his pocket, "First, how much of that story is true? And second, how much are the police going to believe? If he was a pal of Tom Merlin's, that's just the sort of story he would tell, and if it's all my eye and Betty Martin, he couldn't have thought of a better. It don't prove Tom's innocent, but as he says, it's enough to shake the jury. Pity is, he didn't tell it a bit sooner."

It was also, of course, the sort of story a criminal might tell, but in that case he'd have told it at once. Besides, even the optimistic Mr. Crook couldn't suspect Mr. Smyth of the murder. He wasn't the stuff of which murderers are made.

"No personality," decided Crook. "Black tie, wing collar, umbrella and brief case, the 8.10 every weekday—Yes, Mr. Brown. Certainly, Mr. Jones. I will attend to that, Mr. Robinson. Back on the 6.12 regular as clockwork, a newsreel or pottering with the window boxes on Saturday afternoons, long lie-in on Sunday"—that was his programme until the time came for his longest lie-in of all.

And at that moment neither Mr. Smyth nor Arthur Crook had any notion how near that was.

Crook looked at his watch. "Five minutes before the balloon goes up," he observed. It went up like an actor taking his cue. At the end of five minutes the telephone rang again.

As he made his snail's pace of a way towards Charing Cross Mr. Smyth was rehearsing feverishly the precise phrases he would use to Mr. Crook. He was so terrified of the coming interview that only a still greater terror could have urged him forward. For there was nothing of the hero about him. The Services had declined to make use of him during the war, and it had never occurred to him to leave his safe employment and volunteer for anything in the nature of war work. Fire-watching was compulsory.

"The fact is, I wasn't born for greatness," he used to assure himself. "The daily round, the common task . . . I never wanted the limelight." But it looked as though that was precisely what he was going to get. For the hundredth time he found himself wishing he

had never met Isobel Baldry, or, having met her, had never obeyed the mad impulse which made him look up the number she had given him and virtually invite himself to her party. The moment he arrived he knew she had never meant him to accept that invitation.

"And oh, if I hadn't, if I hadn't," he moaned to himself.

The darkness seemed full of eyes and ears. He stopped suddenly to see whether he could surprise stealthy footsteps coming after him, but he heard only the endless lapping of black water against the Embankment, the faint noise of the police launch going downstream, and above both these sounds, the frenzied beating of his own heart. He went on a little way, then found to his horror that he could not move. In front of him the darkness seemed impenetrable; behind him the atmosphere seemed to close up like a wall, barring his retreat. He was like someone coming down the side of a sheer cliff who suddenly finds himself paralysed, unable to move a step in either direction. He didn't know what would have happened, but at that moment a car came through the fog travelling at what seemed to him dangerous speed. It was full of young men, the prototype of those he had met at Isobel Baldry's ill-starred party. They were singing as they went. That gave him a fresh idea, and without moving he began to call "Taxi! Taxi!" Someone in the car heard him and leaned out to shout, "No soap, old boy," but now panic had him in its grip. And it seemed as if then his luck changed. Another vehicle came more slowly through the darkness.

"Taxi!" he called, and to his relief he heard the car stop.

Relief panted in his voice. "I want to go to Bloomsbury Street. No. 123. Do you know it?"

"Another client for Mr. Cautious Crook." The driver gave a huge chuckle. "Well, well."

"You—you mean you know him?"

"All the men on the night shift know about Mr. Crook. Must work on a night shift 'imself, the hours 'e keeps."

"You mean—his clients prefer to see him at night?" He was startled.

"Yerss. Not so likely to be reckernized by a rozzer, see? Oh, 'e gets a queer lot. Though this is the first time I've bin asked to go

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there in a fog like this." His voice sounded dubious. "Don't see 'ow it can be done, guvnor."

"But you must. It's most important. I mean, he's expecting me."

"Sure? On a night like this? You should worry."

"But—I've only just telephoned him." Now it seemed of paramount importance that he should get there by hook or crook.

"Just like that. Lumme, you must be in a 'urry."

"I am. I—I don't mind making it worth your while . . ." It occurred to him that to the driver this sort of conversation might be quite an ordinary occurrence. He hadn't realized before the existence of a secret life dependent on the darkness.

"Cost yer a quid," the driver said promptly.

"A pound?" He was shocked.

"Mr. Crook wouldn't be flattered to think you didn't think 'im worth a quid," observed the driver.

Mr. Smyth made up his mind. "All right."

"Sure you've got it on you?"

"Yes. Oh, I see." He saw that the man intended to have the pound before he started on the journey, and he fumbled for his shabby, shiny notecase and pulled out the only pound it held and offered it to the driver. Even in the fog the driver didn't miss it. He snapped on the light inside the car for an instant to allow Mr. Smyth to get in, then put it off again, and his fare sank sprawling on the cushions, breathing as hard as a spent racer. The driver's voice came to him faintly as he started up the engine.

"After all, guvnor, a quid's not much to save yer neck."

He started. His neck? His neck wasn't in danger. No one thought he'd murdered Isobel Baldry. But the protest died even in his heart within a second. Not his neck but his life—that was what he was paying a pound to save. Now that the car was on its way he knew a pang of security. He was always nervous about journeys, thought he might miss the train, get into the wrong one, find there wasn't a seat. Once the journey started he could relax. He thought about the coming interview; he was pinning all his faith on Arthur Crook. He wouldn't be scared; the situation didn't exist that could scare such a man. And perhaps, he reflected, lulling himself into a false security,

Mr. Crook would laugh at his visitor's fears. That's just what I wanted, he'd say. You've solved the whole case for me, provided the missing link. Justice should be grateful to you, Mr. Smyth. . . . He lost himself in a maze of prefabricated dreams.

Suddenly he realized that the cab, which had been crawling for some time, had now drawn to a complete standstill. The driver got down and opened the door.

"Sorry, sir, this perishin' fog. Can't make it, after all."

"You mean, you can't get there?" He sounded incredulous.

"It's my neck as well as yours," the driver reminded him.

"But—I must—I mean are you sure it's impossible? If we go very slowly . . ."

"If we go much slower we'll be proceedin' backwards. Sorry, guvnor, but there's only one place we'll make to-night if we go any farther and that's Kensal Green. Even Mr. Crook can't 'elp you once you're there."

"Then—where are we now?"

"We ain't a 'undred miles from Charing Cross," returned the driver cautiously. "More than that I wouldn't like to say. But I'm not taking the cab no farther in this. If any mug likes to try pinchin' it 'e's welcome. Most likely wrap 'imself round a lamp-post if he does!"

Reluctantly, Mr. Smyth crawled out into the bleak street; it was bitterly cold and he shivered.

"I'll 'ave to give you that quid back," said the driver, wistfully.

"Well, you didn't get me to Bloomsbury Street, did you?" He supposed he'd have to give the fellow something for his trouble. He put out one hand to take the note and shoved the other into the pocket where he kept his change. Then it happened, with the same shocking suddenness as Isobel Baldry's death. His fingers had just closed on the note when something struck him with appalling brutality. Automatically he grabbed harder, but it wasn't any use; he couldn't hold it. Besides, other blows followed the first. A very hail of blows in fact, accompanied by shock and sickening pain and a sense of the world ebbing away. He didn't really appreciate what had happened; there was too little time. Only as he staggered and

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his feet slipped on the wet leaves of the gutter, so that he went down for good, he thought, the darkness closing on his mind forever, "I thought it was damned comfortable for a taxi."

It was shortly after this that Arthur Crook's telephone rang for the second time, and a nervous voice said, "This is Mr. Smyth speaking. Mr. Crook, I'm sorry I can't make it. I—this fog's too thick. I'll get lost. I'm going right back."

"That's all right," said Crook heartily. "Don't mind me. Don't mind Tom Merlin. We don't matter."

"If I get knocked down in the fog and killed it won't help either of you," protested the voice.

"Come to that, I dare say I won't be any worse off if you are."

"But—you can't do anything to-night."

"If I'm goin' to wait for you I shan't do anything till Kingdom Come."

"I—I'll come to-morrow. It won't make any difference really."

"We've had all this out before," said Crook. "I was brought up strict. Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day."

"But I can't—that's what I'm telling you. I'll come—I'll come at nine o'clock to-morrow."

"If he lets you," said Crook darkly.

"He?"

"He might be waiting for you on the doorstep. You never know. Where are you, by the way?"

"In a call box."

"I know that. I heard the pennies drop. But where?"

"On the Embankment."

"What's the number?"

"It's a call box, I tell you."

"Even call boxes have numbers."

"I don't see . . ."

"Not trying to hide anything from me, Smyth, are you?"

"Of course not. It's Fragonard 1511."

"That's the new Temple exchange. You must have overshot your mark."

"Oh? Yes. I mean, have I?"

"You were coming from Charing Cross. You've walked a station too far."

"It's this fog. I thought—I thought it was Charing Cross just over the road."

"No bump of locality," suggested Crook kindly.

"I can't lose my way if I stick to the Embankment. I'm going straight back to Westminster and let myself into my flat, and I'll be with you without fail at nine sharp to-morrow."

"Maybe," said Crook pleasantly. "Happy dreams." He rang off. "Picture of a gentleman chatting to a murderer," he announced. "Must be a dog's life, a murderer's. So damned lonely. And dangerous. You can't trust anyone, can't confide in anyone, can't even be sure of yourself. One slip and you're finished. One admission of something only the murderer can know and it's the little covered shed for you one of these cold mornings. Besides, you can't guard from all directions at once, and how was the chap who's just rung me to know that Smyth only had two coppers on him when he left his flat to-night, and so he couldn't have put through a second call?"

The inference was obvious. Someone wanted Mr. Crook to believe that Smyth had gone yellow and that was why he hadn't kept his date. Otherwise—who knew?—if the mouse wouldn't come to Mahomet, Mahomet might go looking for the mouse. And later, when the fog had dispersed, some early workman or street cleaner, perhaps even a bobby, would stumble over a body on the Embankment, and he—Crook—would come forward with his story and it would be presumed that the chap had been bowled over in the dark—or even manhandled for the sake of any valuables he might carry. Crook remembered his earlier thought—work for the doctor, for the ambulance driver, for the mortician—and for Arthur Crook. Somewhere at this instant, Smyth lay, deprived forever of the power of passing on information, rescuing an innocent man, helping to bring a guilty one to justice, somewhere between Temple Station and Westminster Bridge.

"And my bet 'ud be Temple Station," Crook told himself.

It was a fantastic situation. He considered for a moment ringing

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the police and telling them the story, but the police are only interested in crimes after they've been committed, and a murder without a corpse just doesn't make sense to them at all. So, decided Mr. Crook, he'd do all their spadework for them, find the body and then sit back and see how they reacted to that. He locked his office, switched off the lights and came tumbling down the stairs like a sack of coals. It was his boast that he was like a cat and could see in the dark, but even he took his time getting to Temple Station. Purely as a precaution, he pulled open the door of the telephone booth nearby and checked the number. As he had supposed, it was Fragonard 1511.

There was a chance, of course, that X. had heaved the body over the Embankment, but Crook was inclined to think not. To begin with, you couldn't go dropping bodies into the Thames without making a splash of some sort, and you could never be sure that the Thames police wouldn't be passing just then. Besides, even small bodies are heavy, and there might be blood. Better on all counts to give the impression of a street accident. Crook had known of cases where men had deliberately knocked out their victims and then ridden over them in cars. Taking his little sure-fire pencil torch from his pocket, Crook began his search. His main fear wasn't that he wouldn't find the body, but that some interfering constable would find him before that happened. And though he had stood up to bullets and blunt instruments in his time, he knew that no career can stand against ridicule. He was working slowly along the Embankment, wondering if the fog would ever lift, when the beam of his torch fell on something white a short distance above the ground. This proved to be a handkerchief tied to the arm of one of the Embankment benches. It was tied hard in a double knot, with the ends spread out, as though whoever put it there wanted to be sure of finding it again. He looked at it for a minute before its obvious significance occurred to him. Why did you tie a white cloth to something in the dark? Obviously to mark a place. If you didn't, on such a night, you'd never find your way back. What he still didn't know was why whoever had put out Smyth's light should want to come back to the scene of the crime. For it was Smyth's handkerchief. He realized that as soon as he had untied it and seen the sprawling letters

"Smyth" in one corner. There was something peculiarly grim about a murderer taking his victim's handkerchief to mark the spot of the crime. After that it didn't take him long to find the body. It lay in the gutter, the blood on the crushed forehead black in the bright torchlight, the face dreadful in its disfigurement and dread. Those who talked of the peace of death ought to see a face like that; it might quiet them a bit, thought Mr. Crook grimly. He'd seen death so often you'd not have expected him to be squeamish, but he could wish that someone else had found Mr. Smyth.

Squatting beside the body like a busy little brown elephant, he went through the pockets. He'd got to find out what the murderer had taken that he had to return. Of course, someone else might have found the body and left the handkerchief, but an innocent man, argued Crook, would have left his own. You'd have to be callous to take things off the body of a corpse. There wasn't much in the dead man's pockets, a notecase with some ten-shilling notes in it, a season ticket, some loose cash, an old-fashioned turnip watch—that was all. No matches, no cigarettes, of course, no handkerchief.

"What's missing?" wondered Mr. Crook, delving his hands into his own pockets and finding there watch, coin, purse, notecase, identity card, tobacco pouch, latchkey. . . . "That's it," said Mr. Crook. "He hasn't got a key. But he talked of going back and letting himself in, so he had a key. . . ." There was the chance that it might have fallen out of his pocket, but though Crook sifted through the damp sooty leaves he found nothing; he hadn't expected to, anyhow. There were only two reasons why X. should have wanted to get into the flat. One was that he believed Smyth had some evidence against him and he meant to lay hands on it; the other was to fix an alibi showing that the dead man was alive at, say, 10.30, at which hour, decided Mr. Crook, the murderer would have fixed an alibi for himself. He instantly cheered up. The cleverest criminal couldn't invent an alibi that an even cleverer man couldn't disprove.

He straightened himself; as he did so he realized that the corpse had one of its hands folded into a fist; it was a job to open the fingers, but when he had done so he found a morsel of tough white paper with a greenish blur on the torn edge. He recognized that all right,

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and in defiance of anything the police might say he put the paper into his pocketbook. The whole world by this time seemed absolutely deserted; every now and again a long melancholy hoot came up from the river from some benighted tug or the sirens at the mouth of the estuary echoed faintly through the murk; but these were other-worldly sounds that increased rather than dispelled the deathlike atmosphere. As to cause of death, his guess would be a spanner. A spanner is a nice anonymous weapon, not too difficult to procure, extraordinarily difficult to identify. Only fools went in for fancy weapons like swordsticks and Italian knives and loaded riding crops, all of which could be traced pretty easily to the owners. In a critical matter like murder it's safer to leave these to the back-room boys and stick to something as common as dirt. Crook was pretty common himself, and, like dirt, he stuck.

"The police are going to have a treat to-night," he told himself, making a beeline for the telephone. His first call was to the dead man's flat, and at first he thought his luck was out. But just when he was giving up hope he could hear the receiver being snatched off and a breathless voice said, "Yes?"

"Mr. Smyth? Arthur Crook here. Just wanted to be sure you got back safely."

"Yes. Yes. But only just. I decided to walk after all."

"Attaboy!" said Mr. Crook. "Don't forget about our date to-morrow."

"Nine o'clock," said the voice. "I will be there."

Mr. Crook hung up the receiver. What a liar you are, he said, and then at long last he dialled 999.

The murderer had resolved to leave nothing to chance. After his call to Mr. Crook's office he came back to the waiting car and drove as fast as he dared back to the block of flats where he lived. At this hour the man in charge of the car park would have gone off duty, and on such a night there was little likelihood of his encountering anyone else. Carefully he ran the car into an empty space and went over it carefully with a torch. He hunted inside in case there should be any trace there of the dead man, but there was none. He had been

careful to do all the opening and closing of doors, so there was no fear of fingerprints, but when he went over the outside of the car his heart jumped into his mouth when he discovered blood-marks on the right-hand passenger door. He found an old rag and carefully polished them off, depositing the rag in a corner at the further end of the car park. This unfortunately showed up the stains of mud and rain on the rest of the body, but he hadn't time to clean all the paint-work; there was still a lot to be done and, as he knew, there is a limit to what a man's nervous system can endure. Locking the car, he made his way round to the entrance of the flats. The porter was just going off; there wasn't a night porter, labour was still scarce, and after 10.30 the tenants looked after themselves.

"Hell of a night, Meadows," he observed, drawing a long breath. "I was beginning to wonder if I'd be brought in feet first."

The porter, a lugubrious creature, nodded with a sort of morbid zest.

"There'll be a lot of men meeting the Recording Angel in the morning that never thought of such a thing when they went out to-night," he said.

His companion preserved a poker face. "I suppose a fog always means death. Still, one man's meat. It means work for doctors and undertakers and ambulance-men. . . ." He didn't say anything about Arthur Crook. He wasn't thinking of Arthur Crook. Still under the man's eye he went upstairs, unlocked the door of his flat, slammed it and, having heard the man depart, came stealing down again, still meeting no one, and gained the street. So far everything had gone according to plan.

It took longer to get to Westminster than he had anticipated, because in the fog he lost his way once, and began to panic, which wasted still more time. His idea was to establish Smyth alive and talking on his own telephone at, say, 10.30 p.m. Then, if questions should be asked, Meadows could testify to his own return at 10.30. On his way back, he would return the key to the dead man's pocket, replace the handkerchief, slip home under cover of darkness. . . . He had it worked out like a B.B.C. exercise.

Luck seemed to be with him. As he entered the flats the hall was

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in comparative darkness. It was one of those houses where you pushed a button as you came in and the light lasted long enough for you to get up two floors; then you pushed another button and that took you up to the top. There wasn't any lift. As he unlocked the door of the flat the telephone was ringing and when he unshipped the receiver there was Arthur Crook, of all the men on earth, calling up the dead man. He shivered to think how nearly he'd missed that call. He didn't stay very long; there was still plenty to do and the sooner he got back to his own flat the more comfortable he'd feel. And how was he to guess that he would never walk inside that flat again?

He congratulated himself on his foresight in tying the handkerchief to the arm of the bench; in this weather he might have gone blundering about for an hour before he found the spot where Smyth lay in the gutter, his feet scuffing up the drenched fallen leaves. As it was he saw his landmark, by torchlight, without any trouble. It was then that things started to go wrong. He was level with the seat when he heard the voice of an invisible man exclaim, "Hey there!" and he jumped back, automatically switching off his torch, and muttering, "Who the devil are you?"

"Sorry if I startled you," said the same voice, "but there's a chap here seems to have come to grief. I wish you'd take a look at him."

This was the one contingency for which he had not prepared himself, but he knew he dared not refuse. He couldn't afford at this stage to arouse suspicion. Besides, he could offer to call the police, make for the call box and just melt into the fog. Come what might, he had to return the dead man's key. He approached the kerb and dropped down beside the body. Crook watched him like a lynx. This was the trickiest time of all; if they weren't careful he might give them the slip yet.

"Have you called the police?" inquired the newcomer, getting to his feet. "If not, I . . ." But at that moment both men heard the familiar sound of a door slamming and an inspector with two men hovering in the background came forward saying, "Now then, what's going on here."

"Chap's got himself killed," said Crook.

X. thought like lightning. He made a slight staggering movement, and as Crook put out his hand to hold him he said, "Silly—slipped on something—don't know what it was." He snapped on his torch again, and stooping, picked up a key. "Must have dropped out of his pocket," he suggested. "Unless," he turned politely to Crook, "unless it's yours."

Crook shook his head.

"Which of you was it called us up?" the Inspector went on.

"I did," said Crook. "And then this gentleman came along and . . ." He paused deliberately and looked at the newcomer. It was a bizarre scene, the men looking like silhouettes against the grey blanket of fog with no light but the torches of the civilians and the bull's-eyes of the force. "Seeing this gentleman's a doctor . . ." As he had anticipated there was an interruption.

"What's that you said?"

"Plenty of fame," said Crook. "Saw your picture in the papers at the time of the Baldry case. Dr. Norman Dunn, isn't it? And perhaps I should introduce myself. I'm Arthur Crook, one of the three men living who *know* Tom Merlin didn't kill Miss Baldry, the others bein' Tom himself and, of course, the murderer."

"Isn't that a coincidence?" said Dr. Dunn.

"There's a bigger one coming," Crook warned him. "While I was waitin' I had a looksee at that little chap's identity card, and who do you think he is? Mr. Alfred Smyth, also interested in the Baldry case."

The doctor swung down his torch. "So that's where I'd seen him before? I had a feeling the face was familiar in a way, only . . ."

"He is a bit knocked about, isn't he?" said Crook. "What should you say did that?"

"I shouldn't care to hazard a guess without a closer examination. At first I took it for granted he'd been bowled over by a car. . . ."

"In that case we ought to be able to trace the car. He can't have gotten all that damage and not left any of his blood on the hood."

There was more noise and a police ambulance drove up and spewed men all over the road. Crook lifted his head and felt a breath of wind on his face. That meant the fog would soon start to lift.

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Long before morning it would have gone. The inspector turned to the two men.

"I'll want you to come with me," he said. "There's a few things I want to know."

"I can't help you," said Dunn sharply, but the inspector told him, "We'll need someone to identify the body."

"Mr. Crook can do that. He knows him."

"Always glad to learn," said Crook.

"But you . . ." He stopped.

"You don't know the police the way I do," Crook assured him. "Just because a chap carries an identity card marked Alfred Smyth—that ain't proof. I never set eyes on him before."

"Mr. Crook's right," said the inspector. "We want someone who saw him when he was alive."

They all piled into the car, Crook and Dunn jammed together, and no one talked. Dunn was thinking hard. Sold for a sucker, he thought. If I hadn't tried so hard for an alibi—perhaps, though, they won't touch Meadows. Meadows will remember, all the same. He'll think it's fishy. And the car. Of course there was blood on the car. If they examine it they'll notice it's washed clean in one place. They'll want to know why. No sense saying I was coming back from the pictures. Meadows can wreck that. Besides, Baron, the man who looks after the cars, may remember mine hadn't come in when he went off duty. Round and round like a squirrel in its cage went his tormented mind. There must be some way out, he was thinking, as thousands have thought before him. They've no proof, no actual proof at all. Outwardly he was calm enough, maintaining the attitude that he couldn't imagine why they wanted him. But inside he was panicking. He didn't like the station surroundings, he didn't like the look on the inspector's face, most of all he feared Crook. The police had to keep the rules; Crook had never heard of Queensberry. To him a fair fight was gouging, shoving, and kicking in the pit of the stomach. A terrible man. But he stuck to it, they hadn't got anything on him that added up to murder. He'd had the forethought to get rid of the spanner, dropped it in one of those disused pig buckets that still disfigured London streets; but he'd had to use the one near his own flats, because

in the dark he couldn't find any others. He thought now the river might have been safer.

He tried to seem perfectly at ease, pulled off his burberry and threw it over the back of a chair, produced his cigarette case.

"Of course, our own doctor will go over the man," the inspector said, "but how long should you say he'd been dead, Dr. Dunn?"

He hesitated. "Not so easy. He was a little chap and it's a bitter cold night. But not long."

"But more than twenty minutes?" the Inspector suggested.

"Yes, more than that, of course."

"That's screwy," said the inspector. "I mean, Mr. Crook was talking to him on the telephone in his flat twenty minutes before you happened along."

He couldn't think how he'd forgotten that telephone conversation. That, intended for his prime alibi, was going to ball up everything.

"I don't see how he could," he protested. "Not unless the chap's got someone doubling for him."

"You know all the answers," agreed Crook. "Matter of fact, the same chap seems to be making quite a habit of it. He rang me a bit earlier from Fragonard 1511 to tell me Smyth couldn't keep an appointment to-night. Well, nobody knew about that but Smyth and me, so how did X. know he wasn't coming, if he hadn't made sure of it himself?"

"Don't ask me," said Dunn.

"We are asking you," said the inspector deliberately.

The doctor stared. "Look here, you're on the wrong tack if you think I know anything. It was just chance. Why don't you send a man round to Smyth's flat and see who's there?"

"We did think of that," the inspector told him. "But there wasn't anyone . . ."

"Then—perhaps this is Mr. Crook's idea of a joke."

"Oh no," said Crook looking shocked. "I never think murder's a joke. A living perhaps, but not a joke."

Dunn made a movement as though to rise. "I'm sorry I can't help you . . ."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," drawled Crook.

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"What does that mean?"

"There's just one point the inspector hasn't mentioned. When I found that poor little devil to-night he'd got a bit of paper in his hand. All right, inspector. I'll explain in a minute. Just now, let it ride." He turned back to Dr. Norman Dunn. "It was a bit of a Treasury note, and it seemed to me that if we could find the rest of that note, why then we might be able to lay hands on the murderer."

"You might. And you think you know where the note is?"

"I could make a guess."

"If you think I've got it . . ." Dunn pulled out his wallet and threw it contemptuously on the table. "You can look for yourself."

"Oh, I don't expect it would be there," replied Crook, paying no attention to the wallet. "But—every murderer makes one mistake, Dunn. If he didn't, God help the police. And help innocent men, too. And a man with murder on his hands is like a chap trying to look four ways at once. Now that note suggested something to me. You don't go round carrying notes in a fog, as if they were torches. You'd only get a note out if you were going to pay somebody, and who's the only person you're likely to want to pay in such circumstances? I'm talking like a damned politician," he added disgustedly. "But you do see what I'm drivin' at?"

"I'm only a doctor," said Dunn. "Not a professional thought-reader."

"You'd pay a man who drove you to your destination—or tried to. There was some reason why Smyth had a note in his hand, and my guess is he was tryin' to pay some chap off. That would explain his bein' at Temple Station. On his own feet he wouldn't have passed Charing Cross, not a chap as frightened of the dark as he was. While he was offerin' the note, X. knocked him out, and realizin' that funny questions might be asked if the note was found with him, he'd remove it. You agree so far?"

"I don't know as much about murder as you do, Mr. Crook," said Dunn.

"That's your trouble," Mr. Crook agreed. "That's always the trouble of amateurs setting up against pros. They're bound to lose. Let's go on. X. removes the note. So far, so good. But he's got a lot

to remember and not much time. He can't be blamed if he don't remember it's trifles that hang a man. If I was asked, I'd say X. shoved that note into his pocket, meanin' to get rid of it later, and I'd say it was there still."

"You're welcome to search my pockets," Dunn assured him. "But I warn you, Crook, you're making a big mistake. Your reputation's not going to be worth even the bit of a note you found in Smyth's hand when this story breaks."

"I'll chance it," said Crook.

At a nod from the inspector, the police took up Dunn's burberry and began to go through the pockets. During the next thirty seconds you could have heard a pin drop. Then the man brought out a fist like a ham, and in it was a crumpled ten-shilling note with one corner missing!

"Anything to say to that?" inquired Crook, who didn't apparently mind hitting a man when he was down.

Dunn put back his head and let out a roar of laughter. "You think you're smart, don't you? You planted that on me, I suppose, when we were coming here. But, as it happens, Smyth's note was for a pound, not ten shillings. You didn't know that, did you?"

"Oh, yes," said Crook, "I did—because I have the odd bit of the note in my wallet. One of the old green ones it was. What I'm wondering is—*how did you?*"

"That was highly irregular, Mr. Crook," observed the Inspector, drawing down the corners of his mouth, after the doctor had been taken away.

"It beats me how the police even catch as many criminals as they do," returned Crook frankly. "Stands to reason if you're after a weasel you got to play like a weasel. And a gentleman—and all the police force are gentlemen—don't know a thing about weasels."

"Funny the little things that catch 'em," suggested the Inspector, wisely letting that ride.

"I reckoned that if he saw the wrong note suddenly shoved under his nose he wouldn't be able to stop himself. It's what I've always said. Murderers get caught because they're yellow. If they just did

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their job and left it at that, they might die in their beds at ninety-nine. But the minute they've socked their man they start feverishly buildin' a little tent to hide in, and presently some chap comes along, who might never have noticed them, but gets curious about the little tent. When you start checking up his story I bet you'll find he's been buildin' alibis like a beaver buildin' a dam. And it's his alibis are goin' to hang him in the end."

His last word in this case was to Tom Merlin and the girl Tom was still going to marry.

"Justice is the screwiest thing there is," he told them. "You're not out of chokey because Norman Dunn killed the Baldry dame, though he's admitted that, too. Well, why not? We know he got Smyth, and you can't hang twice. But it was his killing Smyth that put you back on your feet. If he hadn't done that, we might have had quite a job straightenin' things out. Y'know the wisest fellow ever lived? And don't tell me Solomon."

"Who, Mr. Crook?" asked Tom Merlin's girl, hanging on Tom's arm.

"Brer Rabbit. And why? Becos he lay low and said nuffin'. And then they tell you animals are a lower order of creation!"

The Nine-Mile Walk

HARRY KEMELMAN

I had made an ass of myself in a speech I had given at the Good Government Association dinner, and Nicky Welt had cornered me at breakfast at the *Blue Moon*, where we both ate occasionally, for the pleasure of rubbing it in. I had made the mistake of departing from my prepared speech to criticize a statement my predecessor in the office of District Attorney had made to the press. I had drawn a number of inferences from his statement, and had thus left myself open to a rebuttal which he had promptly made and which had the effect of making me appear intellectually dishonest. I was new to this political game, having but a few months before left the Law School faculty to become the Reform Party candidate for District Attorney. I said as much in extenuation, but Nicholas Welt, who could never drop his pedagogical manner (he was Snowdon Professor of English Language and Literature), replied in much the same tone that he would dismiss a request from a sophomore for an extension on a term paper, "That's no excuse."

Although he is only two or three years older than I, in his late forties, he always treats me like a schoolmaster hectoring a stupid pupil. And I, perhaps because he looks so much older with his white hair and lined, gnome-like face, suffer it.

"They were perfectly logical inferences," I pleaded.

"My dear boy," he purred, "although human intercourse is well-nigh impossible without inference, most inferences are usually wrong. The percentage of error is particularly high in the legal profession, where the intention is not to discover what he wishes to convey, but rather what he wishes to conceal."

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I picked up my check and eased out from behind the table.

"I suppose you are referring to cross-examination of witnesses in court. Well, there's always an opposing counsel who will object if the inference is illogical."

"Who said anything about logic?" he retorted. "An inference can be logical and still not be true."

He followed me down the aisle to the cashier's booth. I paid my check, and waited impatiently while he searched in an old-fashioned change purse, fishing out coins one by one and placing them on the counter beside his check, only to discover that the total was insufficient. He slid them back into his purse and with a tiny sigh extracted a bill from another compartment of the purse and handed it to the cashier.

"Give me any sentence of ten or twelve words," he said, "and I'll build you a logical chain of inferences that you never dreamed of when you framed the sentence."

Other customers were coming in, and since the space in front of the cashier's booth was small, I decided to wait outside until Nicky completed his transaction with the cashier. I remember being mildly amused at the idea that he probably thought I was still at his elbow and was going right ahead with his discourse.

When he joined me on the sidewalk I said, "A nine-mile walk is no joke, especially in the rain."

"No, I shouldn't think it would be," he agreed absently. Then he stopped in his stride and looked at me sharply. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"It's a sentence and it has eleven words," I insisted. And I repeated the sentence, ticking off the words on my fingers.

"What about it?"

"You said that given a sentence of ten or twelve words——"

"Oh, yes." He looked at me suspiciously. "Where did you get it?"

"It just popped into my head. Come on now, build your inferences."

"You're serious about this?" he asked, his little blue eyes glittering with amusement. "You really want me to?"

It was just like him to issue a challenge and then to appear amused when I accepted it. And it made me angry.

"Put up or shut up," I said.

"All right," he said mildly. "No need to be huffy. I'll play. Hm-m, let me see, how did the sentence go? 'A nine-mile walk is no joke, especially in the rain.' Not much to go on there."

"It's more than ten words," I rejoined.

"Very well." His voice became crisp as he mentally squared up to the problem. "First inference: the speaker is aggrieved."

"I'll grant that," I said, "although it hardly seems to be an inference. It's really implicit in the statement."

He nodded impatiently. "Next inference: the rain was unforeseen, otherwise he would have said, 'A nine-mile walk in the rain is no joke,' instead of using the 'especially' phrase as an afterthought."

"I'll allow that," I said, "although it's pretty obvious."

"First inferences should be obvious," said Nicky tartly.

I let it go at that. He seemed to be floundering, and I didn't want to rub it in.

"Next inference: the speaker is not an athlete or an outdoors man."

"You'll have to explain that one," I said.

"It's the 'especially' phrase again," he said. "The speaker does not say that a nine-mile walk in the rain is no joke, but merely the walk—just the distance, mind you—is no joke. Now, nine miles is not such a terribly long distance. You walk more than half that in eighteen holes of golf—and golf is an old man's game," he added slyly. *I play golf.*

"Well, that would be all right under ordinary circumstances," I said, "but there are other possibilities. The speaker might be a soldier in the jungle, in which case nine miles would be a pretty good hike, rain or no rain."

"Yes," and Nicky was sarcastic, "and the speaker might be one-legged. For that matter, the speaker might be a graduate student writing a Ph.D. on humour and starting by listing all the things that are not funny. See here, I'll have to make a couple of assumptions before I continue."

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"How do you mean?" I asked suspiciously.

"Remember, I'm taking this sentence *in vacuo*, as it were. I don't know who said it or what the occasion was. Normally a sentence belongs in the framework of a situation."

"I see. What assumptions do you want to make?"

"For one thing, I want to assume that the intention was not frivolous, that the speaker is referring to a walk that was actually taken, and that the purpose of the walk was not to win a bet or something of that sort."

"That seems reasonable enough," I said.

"And I also want to assume that the locale of the walk is here."

"You mean here in Fairfield?"

"Not necessarily. I mean in this general section of the country."

"Fair enough."

"Then, if you grant those assumptions, you'll have to accept my last inference that the speaker is no athlete or outdoors man."

"Well, all right, go on."

"Then my next inference is that the walk was taken very late at night or very early in the morning—say, between midnight and five or six in the morning."

"How do you figure that one?" I asked.

"Consider the distance, nine miles. We're in a fairly well-populated section. Take any road and you'll find a community of some sort in less than nine miles. Hadley is five miles away, Hadley Falls is seven and a half, Goreton is eleven, but East Goreton is only eight, and you strike East Goreton before you come to Goreton. There is a local train service along the Goreton road and a bus service along the others. All the highways are pretty well travelled. Would anyone have to walk nine miles in a rain unless it were late at night when no buses or trains were running and when the few automobiles that were out would hesitate to pick up a stranger on the highway?"

"He might not have wanted to be seen," I suggested.

Nicky smiled pityingly. "You think he would be less noticeable trudging along the highway than he would be riding in a public conveyance where everyone is usually absorbed in his newspaper?"

"Well, I won't press the point," I said brusquely.

"Then try this one: he was walking towards a town rather than away from one."

I nodded. "It is more likely, I suppose. If he were in a town, he could probably arrange for some sort of transportation. Is that the basis for your inference?"

"Partly that," said Nicky, "but there is also an inference to be drawn from the distance. Remember, it's a *nine*-mile walk and *nine* is one of the exact numbers."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

That exasperated school-teacher look appeared on Nicky's face again. "Suppose you say, 'I took a ten-mile walk' or a 'hundred-mile drive'; I would assume that you actually walked anywhere from eight to a dozen miles, or that you rode between ninety and a hundred and ten miles. In other words, *ten* and *hundred* are round numbers. You might have walked *exactly* ten miles or just as likely you might have walked *approximately* ten miles. But when you speak of walking *nine* miles, I have a right to assume that you have named an exact figure. Now, we are far more likely to know the distance of the city from a given point than we are to know the distance of a given point from the city. That is, ask anyone in the city how far out Farmer Brown lives, and if he knows him, he will say, 'Three or four miles.' But ask Farmer Brown how far he lives from the city and he will tell you, 'Three and six-tenths miles—measured it on my speedometer many a time.' "

"It's weak, Nicky," I said.

"But in conjunction with your own suggestion that he could have arranged transportation if he had been in a city——"

"Yes, that would do it," I said. "I'll pass it. Any more?"

"I've just begun to hit my stride," he boasted. "My next inference is that he was going to a definite destination and that he had to be there at a particular time. It was not a case of going off to get help because his car broke down or his wife was going to have a baby or somebody was trying to break into his house."

"Oh, come now," I said, "the car breaking down is really the most likely situation. He could have known the exact distance from having checked the mileage just as he was leaving the town."

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Nicky shook his head. "Rather than walk nine miles in the rain, he would have curled up on the back seat and gone to sleep, or at least stayed by his car and tried to flag another motorist. Remember, it's nine miles. What would be the least it would take him to hike it?"

"Four hours," I offered.

He nodded. "Certainly no less, considering the rain. We've agreed that it happened very late at night or very early in the morning. Suppose he had his breakdown at one o'clock in the morning. It would be five o'clock before he would arrive. That's daybreak. You begin to see a lot of cars on the road. The buses start just a little later. In fact, the first buses hit Fairfield around 5.30. Besides, if he were going for help, he would not have to go all the way to town—only as far as the nearest telephone. No, he had a definite appointment, and it was in a town, and it was for some time before 5.30."

"Then why couldn't he have got there earlier and waited?" I asked. "He could have taken the last bus, arrived around one o'clock, and waited until his appointment. He walks nine miles in the rain instead, and you said he was no athlete."

We had arrived at the Municipal Building where my office is. Normally, any arguments begun at the *Blue Moon* ended at the entrance to the Municipal Building. But I was interested in Nicky's demonstration, and I suggested that he come up for a few minutes.

When we were seated I said, "How about it, Nicky? Why couldn't he have arrived early and waited?"

"He could have," Nicky retorted. "But since he did not, we must assume that he was either detained until after the last bus left, or that he had to wait where he was for a signal of some sort, perhaps a telephone call."

"Then according to you, he had an appointment some time between midnight and 5.30——"

"We can draw it much finer than that. Remember, it takes him four hours to walk the distance. The last bus stops at 12.30 A.M. If he doesn't take that, but starts at the same time, he won't arrive at his destination until 4.30. On the other hand, if he takes the first bus in the morning, he will arrive around 5.30. That would mean that his appointment was for some time between 4.30 and 5.30."

"You mean that if his appointment were earlier than 4.30, he would have taken the last night bus, and if it were later than 5.30, he would have taken the first morning bus?"

"Precisely. And another thing: if he were waiting for a signal or a phone call, it must have come not much later than one o'clock."

"Yes, I see that," I said. "If his appointment is around five o'clock and it takes him four hours to walk the distance, he'd have to start around one."

He nodded, silent and thoughtful. For some queer reason I could not explain, I did not feel like interrupting his thoughts. On the wall was a large map of the county and I walked over to it and began to study it.

"You're right, Nicky," I remarked over my shoulder, "there's no place as far as nine miles away from Fairfield that doesn't hit another town first. Fairfield is right in the middle of a bunch of smaller towns."

He joined me at the map. "It doesn't have to be Fairfield, you know," he said quietly. "It was probably one of the outlying towns he had to reach. Try Hadley."

"Why Hadley? What would anyone want in Hadley at five o'clock in the morning?"

"The Washington Flyer stops there to take on water about that time," he said quietly.

"That's right, too," I said. "I've heard that train many a night when I couldn't sleep. I'd hear it pulling in and then a minute or two later I'd hear the clock on the Methodist Church banging out five." I went back to my desk for a time-table. "The Flyer leaves Washington at 12.47 A.M. and gets into Boston at 8.00 A.M."

Nicky was still at the map measuring distances with a pencil.

"Exactly nine miles from Hadley is the Old Sumter Inn," he announced.

"Old Sumter Inn," I echoed. "But that upsets the whole theory. You can arrange for transportation there as easily as you can in a town."

He shook his head. "The cars are kept in an enclosure, and you have to get an attendant to check you through the gate. The attendant would remember anyone taking out his car at a strange hour. It's a

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pretty conservative place. He could have waited in his room until he got a call from Washington about someone on the Flyer—maybe the number of the car and the berth. Then he could just slip out of the hotel and walk to Hadley.”

I stared at him, hypnotized.

“It wouldn’t be difficult to slip aboard while the train was taking on water, and then if he knew the car number and the berth——”

“Nicky,” I said portentously, “as the reform District Attorney who campaigned on an economy programme, I am going to waste the tax-payer’s money and call Boston long distance. It’s ridiculous, it’s insane—but I’m going to do it!”

His little blue eyes glittered and he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

“Go ahead,” he said hoarsely.

I replaced the telephone in its cradle.

“Nicky,” I said, “this is probably the most remarkable coincidence in the history of criminal investigation: *a man was found murdered in his berth on last night’s 12.47 from Washington!* He’d been dead about three hours, which would make it exactly right for Hadley.”

“I thought it was something like that,” said Nicky. “But you’re wrong about its being a coincidence. It can’t be. Where did you get that sentence?”

“It was just a sentence. It simply popped into my head.”

“It couldn’t have! It’s not the sort of sentence that pops into one’s head. If you had taught composition as long as I have, you’d know that when you ask someone for a sentence of ten words or so, you get an ordinary statement such as ‘I like milk’—with the other words made up by a modifying clause like, ‘because it is good for my health.’ The sentence you offered related to a *particular situation*.”

“But I tell you I talked to no one this morning. And I was alone with you at the *Blue Moon*.”

“You weren’t with me all the time I paid my check,” he said sharply. “Did you meet anyone while you were waiting on the sidewalk for me to come out of the *Blue Moon*?”

I shook my head. "I was outside for less than a minute before you joined me. You see, a couple of men came in while you were digging out your change and one of them bumped me, as I thought I'd wait——"

"Did you ever see them before?"

"Who?"

"The two men who came in," he said, the note of exasperation creeping into his voice again.

"Why, no—they weren't anyone I knew."

"Were they talking?"

"I guess so. Yes, they were. Quite absorbed in their conversation, as a matter of fact—otherwise, they would have noticed me and I would not have been bumped."

"Not many strangers come into the *Blue Moon*," he remarked.

"Do you think it was they?" I asked eagerly. "I think I'd know them again if I saw them."

Nicky's eyes narrowed. "It's possible. There had to be two—one to trail the victim in Washington and ascertain his berth number, the other to wait here and do the job. The Washington man would be likely to come down here afterwards. If there were theft as well as murder, it would be to divide the spoils. If it was just murder, he would probably have to come down to pay off his confederate."

I reached for the telephone.

"We've been gone less than half an hour," Nicky went on. "They were just coming in, and service is slow at the *Blue Moon*. The one who walked all the way to Hadley must certainly be hungry, and the other probably drove all night from Washington."

"Call me immediately if you make an arrest," I said into the phone, and hung up.

Neither of us spoke a word while we waited. We paced the floor, avoiding each other almost as though we had done something we were ashamed of.

The telephone rang at last. I picked it up and listened. Then I said, "O.K." and turned to Nicky.

"One of them tried to escape through the kitchen but Winn had someone stationed at the back and they got him."

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"That would seem to prove it," said Nicky, with a frosty little smile.

I nodded agreement.

He glanced at his watch. "Gracious!" he exclaimed. "I wanted to make an early start on my work this morning, and here I've already wasted all this time talking with you."

I let him get to the door. "Oh, Nicky," I called, "what was it you set out to prove?"

"That a chain of inferences could be logical and still not be true," he said.

"Oh."

"What are you laughing at?" he asked snappishly. And then he laughed, too.

A Dog in the Daytime

REX STOUT

I do sometimes treat myself to a walk in the rain, though I prefer sunshine as a general rule. That rainy Wednesday, however, there was a special inducement: I wanted his raincoat to be good and wet when I delivered it. So, with it on my back and my old brown felt on my head, I left Nero Wolfe's brownstone house on West 35th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and set out for Arbor Street, which is down in Greenwich Village.

Halfway there the rain stopped and my blood had pumped me warm, so I took the coat off, folded it wet side in, hung it on my arm, and proceeded. Arbor Street, narrow and only three blocks long, had on either side an assortment of old brick houses, mostly of four stories, which were neither spick nor span. Number 29 would be about the middle of the first block.

I reached it, but I didn't enter it. There was a party going on in the middle of the block. A police car was double-parked in front of one of the houses, and a uniformed cop was on the sidewalk in an attitude of authority toward a small gathering of citizens confronting him. As I approached I heard him demanding, "Whose dog is this?"

He was referring, evidently, to an animal with a wet black coat standing behind him. I heard no one claim the dog, but I wouldn't have, anyway, because my attention was diverted. Another police car rolled up and stopped behind the first one, and a man got out, nodded to the cop without halting, and went in the entrance of Number 29.

The trouble was, I knew the man, which is an understatement. I do not begin to tremble at the sight of Sergeant Purley Stebbins of

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Manhattan Homicide West, but his presence and manner made it a cinch that there was a corpse in that house, and if I demanded entry on the ground that I wanted to swap raincoats with a guy who had walked off with mine, there was no question what would happen. My prompt appearance at the scene of a homicide would arouse all Purley's worst instincts, and I might not get home in time for dinner, which was going to be featured by grilled squab with a brown sauce which Fritz calls *Venitienne* and is one of his best.

Purley had disappeared inside without spotting me. The cop was a complete stranger. As I slowed down to detour past him on the narrow sidewalk, he gave me an eye and demanded, "That your dog?"

The dog was nuzzling my knee, and I stooped to give him a pat on his wet black head. Then, telling the cop he wasn't mine, I went on by. At the next corner I turned right, heading back uptown. A wind had started in from the west, but everything was still damp from the rain.

I was well on my way before I saw the dog. Stopping for a light on Ninth Avenue in the Twenties, I felt something at my knee, and there he was. My hand started for his head in reflex, but I pulled it back. I was in a fix. Apparently he had picked me for a pal, and if I just went on he would follow, and you can't chase a dog on Ninth Avenue by throwing rocks. I could have ditched him by taking a taxi the rest of the way, but that would have been pretty rude after the appreciation he had shown of my charm. He had a collar on with a tag and could be identified, and the station house was only a few blocks away, so the simplest way was to convoy him there. I moved to the kerb to reconnoitre, and as I did so a cyclone sailed around the corner and took my hat with it into the middle of the avenue.

I didn't dash out into the traffic, but you should have seen that dog. He sprang across the bow of a big truck, wiping its left front fender with his tail, braked landing to let a car by, sprang again and was under another car—or I thought he was—and then I saw him on the opposite sidewalk. He snatched the hat from under the feet of a pedestrian, turned on a dime, and started back. This time his crossing wasn't so spectacular, but he didn't dally. He came to me

and stood, lifting his head and wagging his tail. I took the hat. It had skimmed a puddle of water on its trip, but I thought he would be disappointed if I didn't put it on, so I did. Naturally, that settled it. I flagged a cab, took the dog in with me, and gave the driver the address of Wolfe's house.

My idea was to take my hat hound upstairs to my room, give him some refreshment, and phone the ASPCA to send for him. But there was no sense in passing up such an opportunity for a little buzz at Wolfe, so, after leaving my hat and the raincoat on the rack in the hall, I proceeded to the office and entered.

"Where the deuce have you been?" Wolfe asked grumpily. "We were going over some lists at six o'clock, and it's a quarter to seven." He was in his oversized chair behind his desk with a book, and his eyes hadn't left the page to spare me a glance.

I answered him. "Returning that fool raincoat. Only, I didn't deliver it, because——"

"What's that?" he snapped. He was glaring at my companion.

"A dog."

"I see it is. I'm in no temper for buffoonery. Get it out of here."

"Yes, sir, right away. I can keep him in my room most of the time, but of course he'll have to come downstairs and through the hall when I take him out. He's a hat hound. There is a sort of problem. His name is Nero, which as you know means 'black', and of course I'll have to change it. Ebony would do, or Jet, or Inky, or——"

"Bah. Flummery!"

"No, sir. I get pretty darned lonesome around here, especially during the four hours a day you're up in the plant rooms. You have your orchids, and Fritz has his turtle, and Theodore has his parakeets up in the potting room, so why shouldn't I have a dog? I admit I'll have to change his name, though he is registered as Champion Nero Charcoal of Bantyscoot."

It was a fizzle. I had expected to induce a major outburst, even possibly something as frantic as Wolfe leaving his chair to evict the beast himself, and there he was gazing at Nero with an expression I had never seen him aim at any human, including me.

"It's not a hound," he said. "It's a Labrador retriever."

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That didn't faze me, from a bird who reads as many books as Wolfe does. "Yes, sir," I agreed. "I only said hound because it would be natural for a private detective to have a hound."

"Labradors," he said, "have a wider skull than any other dog, for brain room. A dog I had when I was a boy, in Montenegro, a small brown mongrel, had a rather narrow skull, but I did not regard it as a defect. I do not remember that I considered that dog to have a defect. To-day I suppose I would be more critical. . . . When you smuggled that creature in here did you take into account the disruption it would cause in this household?"

It had backfired on me. I had learned something new about the big, fat genius: he would enjoy having a dog around, provided he could blame it on me and so be free to beef when he felt like it. As for me, when I retire to the country I'll have a dog, and maybe two, but not in town.

I snapped into reverse. "I guess I didn't," I confessed. "Okay, I'll get rid of him. After all, it's your house."

"I do not want to feel responsible," he said stiffly, "for your privation. I would almost rather put up with the dog than with your reproaches."

"Forget it." I waved a hand. "I'll try to—myself."

"Another thing," he persisted. "I refuse to interfere with any commitment you have made."

"I have made no commitment."

"Then where did you get it?"

"Well, I'll tell you."

I went and sat at my desk and did so. Nero—the four-legged one—came and lay at my feet with his nose just not touching the toe of my shoe. I reported the whole event, with as much detail as if I had been reporting a major case, and when I had finished Wolfe was, of course, quite aware that my presentation of Nero had been a gag. Ordinarily, he would have made his opinion of my performance clear, but this time he skipped it, and it was easy to see why. The idea of having a dog that he could blame on me had got in and stuck. When I came to the end there was a moment's silence; then he said:

"Jet would be an acceptable name for that dog."

"Yeah." I swivelled and reached for the phone. "I'll call the ASPCA to come for him."

"No." He was emphatic.

"Why not?"

"Because there is a better alternative. Call someone you know in the Police Department, anyone, give him the number on the dog's tag, and ask him to find out who the owner is. Then you can inform the owner directly."

He was playing for time. It could happen that the owner was dead or in jail or didn't want the dog back, and, if so, Wolfe could take the position that I had committed myself by bringing the dog home in a taxi and that it would be dishonourable to renege. However, I didn't want to argue, so I phoned a precinct sergeant I knew. He took Nero's number and said he would call me back. Then Fritz entered to announce dinner.

The squabs with that sauce were absolutely edible, as they always are, but other phenomena in the next couple of hours were not so pleasing. The table talk in the dining-room was mostly one-sided and mostly about dogs. Wolfe kept it on a high level, no maudlin sentiment. He maintained that the Basenji was the oldest breed on earth, having originated in Central Africa around 5,000 B.C., whereas there was no trace of the Afghan hound earlier than around 4,000 B.C. To me, all it proved was that he had read a book.

Nero ate in the kitchen with Fritz and made a hit. Wolfe had told Fritz to call him Jet. When Fritz brought in the salad he announced that Jet had wonderful manners and was very smart.

"Nevertheless," Wolfe asked, "wouldn't you think him an insufferable nuisance as a member of the household?"

On the contrary, Fritz declared, Jet would be most welcome.

After dinner, feeling that the newly formed Canine Canonizing League needed slowing down, I first took Nero out for a brief tour and then escorted him up the two flights to my room and left him there. I had to admit he was well-behaved. If I had wanted to take on a dog in town it could have been this one. In my room I told him to lie down, and he did, and when I went to the door to leave, his

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eyes, which were the colour of caramel, made it plain that he would love to come along, but he didn't get up.

Down in the office Wolfe and I got at the lists. They were special offerings from orchid growers and collectors from all over the world, and it was quite a job to check the thousands of items and pick the few that Wolfe might want to give a try. I sat at his desk, across from him, with trays of cards from our files, and we were in the middle of it, around ten-thirty, when the doorbell rang. I went to the hall and flipped a light switch and saw out on the stoop, through the one-way glass panel in the door, a familiar figure—Inspector Cramer of Homicide.

I went to the door, opened it six inches, and asked politely, "Now what?"

"I want to see Wolfe."

"It's pretty late. What about?"

"About a dog."

It is understood that no visitor, and especially no officer of the law, is to be conducted to the office until Wolfe has been consulted, but this seemed to rate an exception. I considered the matter for about two seconds, and then swung the door open and invited cordially:

"Step right in."

"Properly speaking," Cramer declared, as one who wanted above all to be perfectly fair and square, "it's Goodwin I want information from."

He was in the red-leather chair at the end of Wolfe's desk, just about filling it. His big, round face was no redder than usual, his grey eyes no colder, his voice no gruffer. Merely normal.

Wolfe came at me: "Then why did you bring him in here without even asking?"

Cramer interfered for me: "I asked for you. Of course, you're in it. I want to know where the dog fits in. Where is it, Goodwin?"

I inquired innocently, "Dog?"

His lips tightened. "All right; I'll spell it. You phoned the precinct and gave them a tag number and wanted to know who owns the dog. When the sergeant learned that the owner was a man named Philip

Kampf, who was murdered this afternoon in a house at Twenty-nine Arbor Street, he notified Homicide. The officer who had been on post in front of that house had told us that the dog went off with a man who had said it wasn't his dog. After we learned of your inquiry about the owner, the officer was shown a picture of you, and said it was you who enticed the dog. He's outside in my car. Do you want to bring him in?"

"No, thanks. I didn't entice."

"The dog followed you."

I gestured modestly. "Girls follow me, dogs follow me, sometimes even your own dicks follow me. I can't help——"

"Skip the comedy. The dog belonged to a murder victim, and you removed it from the scene of the murder. Where is the dog?"

Wolfe butted in. "You persist," he objected, "in imputing an action to Mr. Goodwin without warrant. He did not 'remove' the dog. I advise you to shift your ground if you expect us to listen."

His tone was firm, but not hostile. I cocked an eye at him. He was probably being indulgent because he had learned that Jet's owner was dead.

"I've got another ground," Cramer asserted. "A man who lives in that house, named Richard Meegan, and who was in it at the time Kampf was murdered, has stated that he came here to see you this morning and asked you to do a job for him. He says you refused the job. That's what he says."

Cramer jutted his chin. "Now. A man at the scene of a murder admits he consulted you this morning. Goodwin shows up at the scene half an hour after the murder was committed, and he entices—okay, the dog goes away with him. The dog that belonged to the victim and had gone to that house with him. How does that look?" He pulled his chin in. "You know the last thing I want in a homicide is to find you or Goodwin anywhere within ten miles of it, because I know from experience what to expect. But when you're there, there you are, and I want to know how and why, and what, and I intend to. Where's the dog?"

Wolfe sighed and shook his head. "In this instance," he said, almost genially, "you're wasting your time. As for Mr. Meegan, he

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phoned this morning to make an appointment and came at eleven. Our conversation was brief. He wanted a man shadowed, but divulged no name or any other specific detail, because in his first breath he mentioned his wife—he was overwrought—and I gathered that his difficulty was marital. As you know, I don't touch that kind of work, and I stopped him. My bluntness enraged him and he dashed out. On his way he took his hat from the rack in the hall, and he took Mr. Goodwin's raincoat instead of his own. Now, Archie, proceed."

Cramer's eyes swivelled to me, and I obeyed: "I didn't find out about the switch in coats until the middle of the afternoon. His was the same colour as mine, but mine's newer. When he phoned for an appointment this morning he gave me his name and address. I wanted to phone him to tell him to bring my coat back, but he wasn't listed, and Information said she didn't have him, so I decided to go get it. I walked, wearing Meegan's coat. There was a cop and a crowd and a PD car in front of Twenty-nine Arbor Street, and as I approached another PD car came, and Purley Stebbins got out and went in, so I decided to skip it, not wanting to go through the torture. There was a dog present, and it nuzzled me, and I patted it. Then I headed for home."

"Did you call the dog or signal it?"

"No. I was at Twenty-eighth Street and Ninth Avenue before I knew it was tailing me. I did not entice or remove. If I did—if there's some kind of a dodge about the dog—please tell me why I phoned the precinct to get the name of his owner."

"I don't know. With Wolfe and you I never know. Where is it?"

I blurted it out before Wolfe could stop me: "Upstairs in my room."

"Bring it down here."

I was up and going, but Wolfe called me sharply: "Archie!"

I turned. "Yes, sir."

"There's no frantic urgency." He said to Cramer, "The animal seems intelligent, but I doubt if it's up to answering questions. I don't want it capering around my office."

"Neither do I."

"Then why bring it down?"

"I'm taking it downtown. We want to try something with it."

Wolfe pursed his lips. "I doubt if that's feasible. Mr. Goodwin has assumed an obligation and will have to honour it. The creature has no master, and so presumably no home. It will have to be tolerated here until Mr. Goodwin gets satisfactory assurance of its future welfare. Archie?"

If we had been alone I would have made my position clear, but with Cramer there I was stuck. "Absolutely," I agreed, sitting down again.

"You see," Wolfe told Cramer. "I'm afraid we can't permit the dog's removal."

"Nuts. I'm taking it."

"Indeed? What writ have you? Replevin? Warrant for arrest as a material witness?"

Cramer opened his mouth, and shut it again. He put his elbows on the chair arms, interlaced his fingers, and leaned forward. "Look. You and Meegan check, either because you're telling it straight, or because you've framed it. But I'm taking the dog. Kampf, the man who was killed, lived on Perry Street, a few blocks away from Arbor Street. He arrived at Twenty-nine Arbor Street, with the dog on a leash, about 5.20 this afternoon.

"The janitor of the house, named Olsen, lives in the basement, and he was sitting at his front window when he saw Kampf arrive with the dog and turn in at the entrance. About ten minutes later he saw the dog come out, with no leash, and right after the dog a man came out. The man was Victor Talento, a lawyer, the tenant of the ground-floor apartment. Talento's story is that he left his apartment to go to an appointment, saw the dog in the hall, thought it was a stray, and chased it out. Olsen says Talento walked off and the dog stayed there on the sidewalk."

Cramer unlaced his fingers and sat back. "About twenty minutes later, around ten minutes to 6.00, Olsen heard someone yelling his name, and went to the rear and up one flight to the ground-floor hall. Two men were there—a live one and a dead one. The live one was Ross Chaffee, a painter, the tenant of the top-floor studio—that's the

Fourth floor. The dead one was the man that had arrived with the dog. He had been strangled with the dog's leash, and the body was at the bottom of the stairs. Chaffee says he found it when he came down to go to an appointment, and that's all he knows. He stayed there while Olsen went downstairs to phone. A squad car arrived at 5.58. Sergeant Stebbins arrived at 6.10. Goodwin arrived at 6.10. Excellent timing."

Wolfe merely grunted.

Cramer continued: "You can have it all. The dog's leash was in the pocket of Kampf's raincoat, which was on him. The laboratory says it was used to strangle him. The routine is still in process. I'll answer questions within reason. The four tenants of the house were all there when Kampf arrived: Victor Talento, the lawyer, on the ground floor; Richard Meegan, whose job you say you wouldn't take, second floor; Jerome Aland, a nightclub comedian, third floor; and Ross Chaffee, the painter, with the top-floor studio. Aland says he was sound asleep until we banged on his door just before taking him down to look at the corpse. Meegan says he heard nothing and knows nothing."

Cramer sat forward again. "Okay, what happened? Kampf went there to see one of those four men, and had his dog with him. It's possible he took the leash off in the lower hall and left the dog there, but I doubt it. At least, it's just as possible that he took the dog along to the door of one of the apartments, and the dog was wet and the tenant wouldn't let it enter, so Kampf left it outside. Another possibility is that the dog was actually present when Kampf was killed, but we'll know more about that after we see and handle the dog. What we're going to do is take the dog in that house and see which door it goes to. We're going to do that now. There's a man out in my car who knows dogs." Cramer stood up.

Wolfe shook his head. "You must be hard put. You say Mr. Kampf lived on Perry Street. With a family?"

"No. Bachelor. Some kind of a writer. He didn't have to make a living; he had means."

"Then the beast is orphaned. He's in your room, Archie?"

"Yes, sir." I got up and started for the door.

Wolfe halted me. "One moment. Go in your room, lock the door, and stay there till I notify you. Go!"

I went. It was either that or quit my job on the spot, and I resign only when we haven't got company. Also, assuming that there was a valid reason for refusing to surrender the dog to the cops, Wolfe was justified. Cramer, needing no warrant to enter the house because he was already in, wouldn't hesitate to mount to my room to do his own fetching, and stopping him physically would have raised some delicate points. Whereas breaking through a locked door would be another matter.

I didn't lock it, because it hadn't been locked for years and I didn't remember where the key was, so I left it open and stood on the sill to listen. If I heard Cramer coming I would shut the door and brace it with my foot. Nero, or Jet, depending on where you stand, came over to me, but I ordered him back, and he went without a murmur. From below came voices, not cordial, but not raised enough for me to get words. Before long there was the sound of Cramer's heavy steps leaving the office and tramping along the hall, then the slam of the front door.

I called down: "All clear?"

"No!" It was a bellow. "Wait till I bolt it!" And after a moment: "All right!"

I shut my door and descended the stairs. Wolfe was back in his chair behind his desk, sitting straight. As I entered he snapped at me: "A pretty mess! You sneak a dog in here to badger me, and what now?"

I crossed to my desk, sat, and spoke calmly: "We're 'way beyond that. You will never admit you bollixed it up yourself, so forget it. When you ask me what now, that's easy. I could say I'll take the dog down and deliver him at Homicide, but we're beyond that too. Not only have you learned that he is orphaned, as you put it, and therefore adopting him will probably be simple, but also you have taken a stand with Cramer, and of course you won't back up. If we sit tight, with the door bolted, I suppose I can take the dog out back for his outings, but what if the law shows up to-morrow with a writ?"

He leaned back and shut his eyes. I looked at the wall clock: two minutes past eleven. I looked at my wrist watch: also two minutes past eleven. They both said six minutes past when Wolfe opened his eyes.

"From Mr. Cramer's information," he said, "I doubt if that case holds any formidable difficulties."

I had no comment.

"If it were speedily solved," he went on, "your commitment to the dog could be honoured, at leisure. Clearly, the simplest way to settle this matter is to find out who killed Mr. Kampf. It may not be much of a job; if it proves otherwise, we can reconsider. An immediate exploration is the thing, and luckily we have a pretext for it. You can go to Arbor Street to get your raincoat, taking Mr. Meegan's with you, and proceed as the occasion offers. The best course would be to bring him here; but, as you know, I rely wholly on your discretion and enterprise in such a juncture."

"Thank you very much," I said bitterly. "You mean now?"

"Yes."

"They may still have Meegan downtown."

"I doubt if they'll keep him overnight. In the morning they'll probably have him again."

"I'll be hanged." I arose. "No client, no fee—no nothing except a dog with a wide skull for brain room." I went to the hall rack for my hat and Meegan's coat, and beat it.

The rain had ended and the wind was down. Dismissing the taxi at the end of Arbor Street, I walked to Number 29, with the raincoat hung over my arm. There was light behind the curtains of the windows on the ground floor, but none anywhere above, and none in the basement. Entering the vestibule, I inspected the labels in the slots between the mailboxes and the buttons. From the bottom up they read: Talento, Meegan, Aland, and Chaffee. I pushed Meegan's button, put my hand on the doorknob, and waited. No click. I twisted the knob and it wouldn't turn. Another long push on the button, and a longer wait. Nothing doing.

I considered pushing the button of Victor Talento, the lawyer who

lived on the ground floor, where light was showing; instead, I voted to wait a while for Meegan, with whom I had an in. I moved to the sidewalk, propped myself against a fire hydrant, and waited.

I hadn't been there long enough to shift position more than a couple of times when the light disappeared on the ground floor of Number 29. A little later the vestibule door opened and a man came out. He turned toward me, gave me a glance as he passed, and kept going.

Thinking it unlikely that any occupant of that house was being extended the freedom of the city that night, I cast my eyes around, and, sure enough, when the subject had gone some thirty paces a figure emerged from an areaway across the street and started strolling after him. I shook my head in disapproval. I would have waited until the guy was ten paces farther. Saul Panzer would have made it ten more than that, but Saul is the best tailer alive.

As I stood deploring that faulty performance, an idea hit me. They might keep Meegan downtown another two hours, or all night, or he might even be up in his bed asleep. This was at least a chance to take a stab at something. I shoved off, in the direction taken by the subject, who was now a block away. Stepping along, I gained on him.

little beyond the corner I came abreast of the city employee, who was keeping to the other side of the street, but I wasn't interested in him. It seemed to me that the subject was upping the stroke a little, so I did, too, and as he reached the next intersection I was beside him.

I said: "Victor Talento?"

"No comment," he said, and kept going. So did I.

"Thanks for the compliment," I said, "but I'm not a reporter. My name's Archie Goodwin, and I work for Nero Wolfe. If you'll stop a second I'll show you my credentials."

"I'm not at all interested in your credentials."

"Okay. If you just came out for a breath of air you won't be interested in this, either. Otherwise, you may be. Please don't scream or look around, but you've got a homicide dick on your tail. He's across the street, ninety feet back."

"Yes," he conceded, without changing pace, "that's interesting. Is this your good deed for the day?"

"No. I'm out dowsing for Mr. Wolfe. He's investigating a murder just for practice, and I'm looking for a seam. I thought if I gave you a break you might feel like reciprocating. If you're just out for a walk, forget it, and sorry I interrupted. If you're headed for something you'd like to keep private, maybe you could use some expert advice. In this part of town at this time of night there are only two approved methods for shaking a tail, and I'd be glad to oblige."

He looked it over for half a block, with me keeping step, and then spoke: "You mentioned credentials."

"Right. We might as well stop under that light. The dick will, of course, keep his distance."

We stopped. I got out my wallet and let him have a look at my licences, detective and driver's. He didn't skimp it, being a lawyer.

"Of course," he said, "I was aware that I might be followed."

"Sure."

"I intended to take precautions. But I suppose it's not always as simple as it seems. I have had no experience at this kind of manoeuvre. Who hired Wolfe to investigate?"

"I don't know. He says he needs practice."

He stood sizing me up by the street light. He was an inch shorter than I am, and some older, with his weight starting to collect around the middle. He was dark-skinned, with eyes to match.

"I have an appointment," he said.

I waited.

He went on: "A woman phoned me and I arranged to meet her. My wire could have been tapped."

"I doubt it. They're not that fast."

"I suppose not. The woman had nothing to do with the murder, and neither had I, but of course anything I do and anyone I see is suspect. I have no right to expose her to possible embarrassment. I can't be sure of shaking that man off."

I grinned at him. "And me, too."

"You mean you would follow me?"

"Certainly, for practice. And I'd like to see how you handle it."

He wasn't returning my grin. "I see you've earned your reputation, Goodwin. You'd be wasting your time, because this woman has no

connection with this business, but I should have known better than to make this appointment. It's only three blocks from here. You might be willing to go and tell her I'm not coming. Yes?"

"Sure, if it's only three blocks. If you'll return the favour by calling on Nero Wolfe for a little talk. That's what I meant by reciprocating."

He considered it. "Not tonight. I'm all in."

"To-morrow morning at eleven?"

"Yes, I can make it then."

"Okay." I gave him the address. "Now brief me."

He took a respectable roll of bills from his pocket and peeled off a twenty. "Since you're acting as my agent, you have a right to a fee."

I grinned again. "That's a neat idea, you being a lawyer, but I'm not acting as your agent. I'm doing you a favour on request and expecting one in return. Where's the appointment?"

He put the roll back. "Have it your way. The woman's name is Jewel Jones, and she's at the southeast corner of Christopher and Grove Streets, or will be." He looked at his wrist. "We were to meet there at midnight. She's medium height, slender, dark hair and eyes, very good-looking. Tell her why I'm not coming, and say she'll hear from me to-morrow."

"Right. You'd better take a walk in the other direction to keep the dick occupied, and don't look back."

He wanted to shake hands to show his appreciation, but that would have been just as bad as taking the twenty, since before another midnight Wolfe might be tagging him for murder, so I pretended not to notice. He headed east and I west, moving right along.

I had to make sure that the dick didn't switch subjects, but I let that wait until I got to Christopher Street. Reaching it, I turned the corner, went twenty feet to a stoop, slid behind it with only my head out, and counted a slow hundred. There were passers-by—a couple and a guy in a hurry—but no dick. I went on a block to Grove Street, passed the intersection, saw no loitering female, continued for a distance, then turned and back-tracked. I was on the fifth lap, and it was eight minutes past 12, when a taxi stopped at the corner, a woman got out, and the taxi rolled off.

I approached. The light could have been better, but she seemed to

meet the specifications. I stopped and asked, "Jones?" She drew herself up. I said, "From Victor."

She tilted her head back to see my face. "Who are you?" She seemed a little out of breath.

"Victor sent me with a message, but naturally I have to be sure it reaches the right party. I've ante-ed half of your name and half of his, so it's your turn."

"Who are you?"

I shook my head. "You go first, or no message from Victor."

"Where is he?"

"No. I'll count ten and go. One, two, three, four——"

"My name is Jewel Jones. His is Victor Talento."

"That's the girl. I'll tell you." I did so, giving a complete version of my encounter with Talento, and including, of course, my name and status. By the time I finished she had developed a healthy frown.

She moved and put a hand on my arm. "Come and put me in a taxi."

I stayed planted. "I'll be glad to, and it will be on me. We're going to Nero Wolfe's place."

"We?" She removed the hand. "You're crazy."

"One will get you ten I'm not. Look at it. You and Talento made an appointment at a street corner, so you had some good reason for not wanting to be seen together tonight. It must have been something fairly urgent. I admit the urgency didn't have to be connected with the murder of Philip Kampf, but it could be. I don't want to be arbitrary. I can take you to a homicide sergeant named Stebbins and you can discuss it with him, or I'll take you to Mr. Wolfe."

She had well-oiled gears. For a second, as I spoke, her eyes flashed like daggers, but then they went soft and appealing. She took my arm again, this time with both hands. "I'll discuss it with you," she said, in a voice she could have used to defrost her refrigerator. "I wouldn't mind that. We'll go somewhere."

I said come on, and we moved, with her hand hooked cosily on my arm. We hadn't gone far, toward Seventh Avenue, when a taxi came along and I flagged it and we got in. I told the driver, "Nine-sixteen West Thirty-fifth," and he started.

"What's that?" Miss Jones demanded.

I told her, Nero Wolfe's house. The poor girl didn't know what to do. If she called me a rat, that wouldn't help her any. If she kicked and screamed, I would merely tell the hackie, Headquarters. Her best bet was to try to thaw me, and if she had had time for a real campaign—say four or five hours—she might conceivably have made some progress, because she had a knack for it.

There just wasn't time enough. The taxi rolled to the kerb and I had a bill ready for the driver. I got out, gave her a hand, and escorted her up the seven steps of the stoop. I pushed the button, and in a moment the stoop light shone on us, the chain bolt was released, and the door opened. I motioned her in and followed. Fritz was there.

"Mr. Wolfe up?" I asked.

"In the office." He was giving Miss Jones a look, the look he gives any strange female who enters that house. There is always in his mind the possibility, however remote, that she will bewitch Wolfe into a mania for a mate. I asked him to conduct her to the front room, put my hat and the raincoat on the rack, and went on down the hall to the office.

Wolfe was at his desk, reading; and curled up in the middle of the room, on the best rug in the house, was the dog. The dog greeted me by lifting his head and tapping the rug with his tail. Wolfe greeted me by grunting.

"I brought company," I told him. "Before I introduce her I should——"

"Her? The tenants of that house are all men! I might have known you'd dig up a woman!"

"I can chase her if you don't want her. This is how I got her." I proceeded, not dragging it out, but including all the essentials. I ended up, "I could have grilled her myself, but it would have been risky. Just in a six-minute taxi ride she had me feeling—uh, brotherly. Do you want her or not?"

"Confound it." His eyes went to his book and stayed there long enough to finish a paragraph. "Very well, bring her."

I crossed to the connecting door to the front room, opened it, and requested, "Please come in, Miss Jones." She came, and as she

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passed through gave me a wistful smile that might have gone straight to my heart if there hadn't been a diversion. As she entered, the dog suddenly sprang to his feet and made for her, with sounds of unmistakable pleasure. He stopped in front of her, wagging his tail so fast it was only a blur.

"Indeed," Wolfe said. "How do you do, Miss Jones? I am Nero Wolfe. What's the dog's name?"

I claim she was good. The presence of the dog was a complete surprise to her. But without the slightest sign of fluster she put out a hand to give it a gentle pat, then went to the red-leather chair and sat down.

"That's a funny question right off," she said. "Asking me your dog's name."

"Pfui." Wolfe was disgusted. "I don't know what position you were going to take, but from what Mr. Goodwin tells me I would guess you were going to say that the purpose of your appointment with Mr. Talento was a personal matter that had nothing to do with Mr. Kampf or his death, and that you knew Mr. Kampf either slightly or not at all. Now the dog has made that untenable. Obviously, he knows you well, and he belonged to Mr. Kampf. So you knew Mr. Kampf well. If you try to deny that, you'll have Mr. Goodwin and other trained men digging all around you, your past and your present, and that will be extremely disagreeable, no matter how innocent you may be of murder or any other wrongdoing. You won't like that. What's the dog's name?"

She looked at me and I looked back. In good light I would have qualified Talento's specification of "very good-looking". Not that she was unsightly, but she caught the eye more by what she looked than how she looked. It wasn't just something she turned on as needed; it was there even now, when she must have been pretty busy deciding how to handle the situation.

It took her only a few seconds to decide. "His name is Bootsy," she said. The dog, at her feet, lifted his head and wagged his tail.

"Good heavens," Wolfe muttered. "No other name?"

"Not that I know of."

"Your name is Jewel Jones?"

"Yes. I sing in a night club, but I'm not working right now." She made a little gesture, very appealing, but it was Wolfe who had to resist it, not me. "Believe me, Mr. Wolfe, I don't know anything about that murder. If I knew anything that could help I'd be perfectly willing to tell you, because I'm sure you're the kind of man who understands, and you wouldn't want to hurt me if you didn't have to."

"I try to understand," Wolfe said dryly. "You knew Mr. Kampf intimately?"

"Yes, I guess so." She smiled, as one understander to another. "For a while I did. Not lately—not for the past two months."

"You met the dog at his apartment on Perry Street?"

"That's right. For nearly a year I was there quite often."

"You and Mr. Kampf quarrelled?"

"Oh, no, we didn't quarrel. I just didn't see him any more. I had other—I was very busy."

"When did you see him last?"

"About two weeks ago, at the club. He came to the club once or twice and spoke to me there."

"But no quarrel?"

"No, there was nothing to quarrel about."

"You have no idea who killed him, or why?"

"I certainly haven't."

Wolfe leaned back. "Do you know Mr. Talento intimately?"

"No, not if you mean—of course, we're friends. I used to live there. I had the second-floor apartment."

"At Twenty-nine Arbor Street?"

"Yes."

"For how long? When?"

"For nearly a year. I left there—let's see—about three months ago. I have a little apartment on East Forty-ninth Street."

"Then you know the others, too? Mr. Meegan and Mr. Chaffee and Mr. Aland?"

"I know Ross Chaffee and Jerry Aland, but no Meegan. Who's he?"

"A tenant at Twenty-nine Arbor Street. Second floor."

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She nodded. "Well, sure, that's the floor I had." She smiled. "I hope they fixed that rickety table for him. That was one reason I left. I hate furnished apartments, don't you?"

Wolfe made a face. "In principle, yes. I take it you now have your own furniture. Supplied by Mr. Kampf?"

She laughed—more of a chuckle—and her eyes danced. "I see you didn't know Phil Kampf."

"Not supplied by him, then?"

"A great big no."

"By Mr. Chaffee? Or Mr. Aland?"

"No and no." She went very earnest: "Look, Mr. Wolfe. A friend of mine was mighty nice about that furniture, and we'll just leave it. Mr. Goodwin told me what you're interested in is the murder, and I'm sure you wouldn't want to drag in a lot of stuff just to hurt me and a friend of mine, so we'll forget about the furniture."

Wolfe didn't press it. He took a hop. "Your appointment on a street corner with Mr. Talento. What was that about?"

She nodded. "I've been wondering about that—I mean, what I would say when you asked me—because I'd hate to have you think I'm a sap, and I guess it sounds like it. I phoned him when I heard on the radio that Phil was killed, there on Arbor Street. I knew Vic still lived there, and I simply wanted to ask him about it."

"You had him on the phone."

"He didn't seem to want to talk about it on the phone."

"But why a street corner?"

This time it was more like a laugh. "Now, Mr. Wolfe, *you're* not a sap. You asked about the furniture, didn't you? Well, a girl with furniture shouldn't be seen with Vic Talento."

"What is he like?"

She fluttered a hand. "Oh, he wants to get close."

Wolfe kept at her until after one o'clock, and I could report it all, but it wouldn't get you any farther than it did him. He couldn't trip her or back her into a corner. She hadn't been to Arbor Street for two months. She hadn't seen Chaffee or Aland or Talento for weeks, and of course not Meegan, since she had never heard of him before. She couldn't even try to guess who had killed Kampf.

The only thing remotely to be regarded as a return on Wolfe's investment of a full hour was her statement that, as far as she knew, there was no one who had both an attachment and a claim to Bootsy. If there were heirs, she had no idea who they were. When she left the chair to go, the dog got up, too. She patted him, and he went with us to the door. I took her to Tenth Avenue and put her in a taxi, and returned.

"Where's Bootsy?" I inquired.

"No," Wolfe said emphatically.

"Okay." I surrendered. "Where's Jet?"

"Down in Fritz's room. He'll sleep there. You don't like him."

"That's not true, but you can have it. It means you can't blame him on me. Anyhow, that will no longer be an issue after Homicide comes in the morning with a document and takes him away."

"They won't come."

"I offer twenty to one. Before noon."

He nodded. "That was, roughly, my own estimate of the probability, so while you were out I phoned Mr. Cramer. I suggested an arrangement, and I suppose he inferred that if he declined the arrangement the dog might be beyond his jurisdiction, before tomorrow. I didn't say so, but I may have given him that impression."

"Yeah. You should be more careful."

"So the arrangement has been made. You are to be at Twenty-nine Arbor Street, with the dog, at nine o'clock in the morning. You are to be present throughout the fatuous performance the police have in mind, and keep the dog in view. The dog is to leave the premises with you, before noon, and you are to bring him back here. The police are to make no further effort to constrain the dog for twenty-four hours. While in that house you may find an opportunity to flush something or someone more contributive than Jewel Jones. . . ."

It was a fine, bright morning. I didn't take Meegan's raincoat, because I didn't need any pretext, and I doubted if the programme would offer a likely occasion for the exchange.

The law was there in front waiting for me. The plainclothes man who knew dogs was a stocky, middle-aged guy who wore rimless

glasses. Before he touched the dog he asked me its name, and I told him Bootsy.

"A heck of a name," he observed. "Also, that's some leash you've got."

"I agree. His was on the corpse, so I suppose it's in the lab." I handed him my end of the heavy cord. "If he bites you it's not on me."

"He won't bite me. Would you, Bootsy?" He squatted before the dog and started to get acquainted.

Sergeant Purley Stebbins growled a foot from my ear, "He should have bit you when you kidnapped him."

I turned. Purley was half an inch taller than I am and two inches broader. "You've got it twisted," I told him. "It's women that bite me. I've often wondered what would bite you."

We continued exchanging pleasantries, while the dog man, whose name was Larkin, made friends with Bootsy. It wasn't long before he announced that he was ready to proceed. He was frowning. "In a way," he said, "it would be better to keep him on leash after I go in, because Kampf probably did. . . . Or did he? How much do we actually know?"

"To swear to," Purley told him, "very little. But putting it all together from what we've collected, this is how it looks: When Kampf and the dog entered, it was raining and the dog was wet. Kampf removed the leash, either in the ground-floor hall or one of the halls above. He had the leash in his hand when he went to the door of one of the apartments. The tenant of the apartment let him in and they talked. The tenant socked him, probably from behind without warning, and used the leash to finish him. The murderer stuffed the leash in the pocket of the raincoat.

"It took nerve and muscle to carry the body out and down the stairs to the lower hall, but he had to get it out of his place and away from his door, and any of those four could have done it in a pinch. Of course, the dog was already outside, out on the sidewalk. While Kampf was in one of the apartments getting killed, Talento had come into the lower hall and seen the dog and chased it out."

"Then," Larkin objected, "Talento's clean."

"No. Nobody's clean. If it was Talento, after he killed Kampf he went out to the hall and put the dog in the vestibule, went back in his apartment and carried the body out and dumped it at the foot of the stairs, and then left the house, chasing the dog on out to the sidewalk. You're the dog expert. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"Not necessarily. It depends on the dog and how close he was to Kampf. There wasn't any blood."

"Then that's how I'm buying it. If you want it filled in you can spend the rest of the day with the reports of the other experts and the statements made by the tenants."

"Some other day. That'll do for now. You're going in first?"

"Yeah. Come on, Goodwin." Purley started for the door, but I objected: "I'm staying with the dog."

Purley looked disgusted. "Then keep behind Larkin."

I changed my mind. From behind Larkin the view wouldn't be good. So I went into the vestibule with Purley. The inner door was opened by a homicide colleague, and we crossed to the far side of the small lobby. The colleague closed the door. In a minute he pulled it open again, and Larkin and the dog entered.

Two steps in, Larkin stopped, and so did the dog. No one spoke. The leash hung limp. Bootsy looked around at Larkin. Larkin bent over and untied the cord from the collar, and held it up to show Bootsy he was free. Bootsy came over to me and stood, his head up, wagging his tail.

"Nuts," Purley said, disgusted.

"You know what I really expected," Larkin said. "I never thought he'd show us where Kampf went when they entered yesterday, but I did think he'd go to the foot of the stairs, where the body was found, and I thought he might go on to where the body came from—Talento's door, or upstairs. Take him by the collar, Goodwin, and ease him over to the foot of the stairs."

I obliged. He came without urging, but gave no sign that the spot held any special interest for him. We all stood and watched him. He opened his mouth wide to yawn.

"Fine," Purley rumbled. "Just fine. You might as well go on with it."

A Dog in the Daytime

Larkin came and fastened the leash to the collar, led Bootsy across the lobby to a door, and knocked. In a moment the door opened, and there was Victor Talento, in a fancy rainbow dressing-gown.

"Hello, Bootsy," he said, and reached down to pat.

Purley snapped, "I told you not to speak!"

Talento straightened up. "So you did." He was apologetic. "I'm sorry; I forgot. Do you want to try it again?"

"No. That's all."

Talento backed in and closed the door.

"You must realize," Larkin told Purley, "that a Labrador can't be expected to go for a man's throat. They're not that kind of dog. The most you could expect would be an attitude, or possibly a growl."

"You can have 'em," Purley said. "Is it worth going on?"

"By all means. You'd better go first."

Purley started up the stairs, and I followed him. The upper hall was narrow and not very light, with a door at the rear end and another toward the front. We backed up against the wall opposite the front door to leave enough space for Larkin and Bootsy. They came, Bootsy tagging, and Larkin knocked. Ten seconds passed before footsteps sounded, and then the door was opened by the specimen who had dashed out of Wolfe's place the day before and taken my coat with him. He was in his shirt sleeves and he hadn't combed his blond hair.

"This is Sergeant Larkin, Mr. Meegan," Purley said. "Take a look at the dog. Have you ever seen it before? Pat it."

Meegan snorted. "Pat it yourself."

"Have you ever seen it before?"

"No."

"Okay; thanks. Come on, Larkin."

As we started up the next flight the door slammed behind us, good and loud. Purley asked over his shoulder, "Well?"

"He didn't like him," Larkin replied from the rear, "but there are lots of people lots of dogs don't like."

The third-floor hall was a duplicate of the one below. Again Purley and I posted ourselves opposite the door, and Larkin came with

Bootsy and knocked. Nothing happened. He knocked again, louder, and pretty soon the door opened to a two-inch crack and a squeaky voice came through:

"You've got the dog."

"Right here," Larkin told him.

"Are you there, Sergeant?"

"Right here," Purley answered.

"I told you that dog didn't like me. Once at a party at Phil Kampf's as I told you. I didn't mean to hurt it, but it thought I did. What are you trying to do—frame me?"

"Open the door. The dog's on a leash."

"I won't! I told you I wouldn't!"

Purley moved. His arm, out stiff, went over Larkin's shoulder, and his palm met the door and shoved hard. The door hesitated an instant, then swung open. Standing there, holding to its edge, was a skinny individual in red-and-green striped pyjamas. The dog let out a low growl and backed up a little.

"We're making the rounds, Mr. Aland," Purley said, "and we couldn't leave you out. Now you can go back to sleep. As for trying to frame you——" He stopped because the door shut.

"You didn't tell me," Larkin complained, "that Aland had already fixed it for a reaction."

"No, I thought I'd wait and see. One to go." He headed for the stairs.

The top-floor hall had had someone's personal attention. It was no bigger than the others, but it had a nice, clean tan-coloured runner, and the walls were painted the same shade and sported a few small pictures. Purley went to the rear door instead of the front, and we made room for Larkin and Bootsy. When Larkin knocked, footsteps responded at once, and the door swung wide open. This was the painter, Ross Chaffee, and he was dressed for it, in an old brown smock. He was by far the handsomest of the tenants—tall, erect, with features he must have enjoyed looking at in the mirror.

I had ample time to enjoy them, too, as he stood smiling at us, completely at ease, obeying Purley's prior instructions not to speak. Bootsy was also at ease. When it became quite clear that no blood

was going to be shed, Purley asked, "You know the dog, don't you, Mr. Chaffee?"

"Certainly. He's a beautiful animal."

"Pat him."

"With pleasure." He bent gracefully. "Bootsy, do you know your master's gone?" He scratched behind the black ears. "Gone forever, Bootsy, and that's too bad." He straightened. "Anything else? I'm working. I like morning light."

"That's all, thanks." Purley turned to go, and I let Larkin and Bootsy by before following. On the way down the three flights no one had any remarks. As we hit the lower hall Victor Talento's door opened, and he emerged.

"The District Attorney's office telephoned," he said. "Are you through with me? They want me down there."

"We're through," Purley said. "We can run you down."

Talento said that would be fine and he would be ready in a minute. Purley told Larkin to give me Bootsy, and he handed me the leash.

I departed. Outside, the morning was still fine. The presence of two PD cars in front of the scene of a murder had attracted a small gathering, and Bootsy and I were objects of interest as we appeared and started off. We both ignored the stares. We moseyed along, in no hurry, stopping now and then to give Bootsy a chance to inspect something if he felt inclined. At the fourth or fifth stop, more than a block away, I saw the quartet leaving Number 29. Stebbins and Talento took one car, Larkin and the colleague the other, and they rolled off.

I shortened up on Bootsy a little, walked him west until an empty taxi appeared, stopped it, and got in. I took a five-dollar bill from my wallet and handed it to the hackie.

"Thanks," he said with feeling. "For what—down payment on the cab?"

"You'll earn it, brother," I assured him. "Is there somewhere within a block or so of Arbor and Court where you can park for anywhere from thirty minutes to three hours?"

"Not three hours for a finif."

"Of course not." I took out another five and gave it to him. "I doubt if it will be that long."

"There's a parking lot not too far. On the street without a passenger I'll be hailed."

"You'll have a passenger: the dog. I prefer the street. Let's see what we can find."

There are darned few legal parking spaces in all Manhattan at that time of day, and we cruised around several corners before we found one, on Court Street two blocks from Arbor. He backed into it and I got out, leaving the windows down three inches. I told him I'd be back when he saw me and headed south, turning right at the second corner.

There was no police car at 29 Arbor, and no gathering. That was satisfactory. Entering the vestibule, I pushed the button under "Meegan" and put my hand on the knob. No click. Pushing twice more and still getting no response, I tried Aland's button, and that worked. After a short wait the click came, and I entered, mounted two flights, and knocked with authority on Aland's door.

The squeaky voice came through: "Who is it?"

"Goodwin. I was just here with the others. I haven't got the dog."

The door swung slowly to a crack, and then wider. Jerome Aland was still in his gaudy pyjamas. "What do you want now?" he asked. "I need some sleep!"

I didn't apologize. "I was going to ask you some questions when I was here before," I told him, "but the dog complicated it. It won't take long." Since he wasn't polite enough to move aside, I had to brush him, skinny as he was, as I went in.

He slid past me, and I followed him across the room to chairs. They were the kind of chairs that made Jewel Jones hate furnished apartments. He sat on the edge of one and demanded, "All right; what is it?"

It was a little tricky. Since he was assuming I was one of the homicide personnel, it wouldn't do for me to know either too much or too little. It would be risky to mention Jewel Jones, because the cops might not have got around to her at all.

A Dog in the Daytime

"I'm checking some points," I told him. "How long has Richard Meegan occupied the apartment below you?"

"I've told you that a dozen times."

"Not me. I said I'm checking. How long?"

"Nine days. He took it a week ago Tuesday."

"Who was the previous tenant? Just before him."

"There wasn't any. It was empty."

"Empty since you've been here?"

"No, I've told you, a girl had it, but she moved out about three months ago. Her name is Jewel Jones, and she's a fine artist, and she got me my job at the night club where I work now." His mouth worked. "I know what you're doing. You're trying to make it nasty and you're trying to catch me getting my facts twisted. Bringing that dog here to growl at me—can I help it if I don't like dogs?"

He ran his fingers, both hands, through his hair. When the hair was messed good he gestured like the night-club comedian he was. "Die like a dog," he said. "That's what Phil did—died like a dog."

"You said," I ventured, "that you and he were good friends."

His head jerked up. "I did not!"

"Maybe not in those words. . . . Why? Weren't you?"

"We were not. I haven't got any good friends."

"You just said that the girl who used to live here got you a job. That sounds like a good friend. Or did she owe you something?"

"Of course not. Why do you keep bringing her up?"

"I didn't bring her up—you did. I only asked who was the former tenant in the apartment below you. Why? Would you rather keep her out of it?"

"I don't have to keep her out. She's not in it."

"Perhaps not. Did she know Philip Kampf?"

"I guess so. Sure, she did."

"How well did she know him?"

He shook his head. "If Phil was alive you could ask him, and he might tell you. Me, I don't know."

I smiled at him. "All that does, Mr. Aland, is make me curious. Somebody in this house murdered Kampf. So we ask you questions,

and when we come to one you shy at, naturally we wonder why. If you don't like talking about Kampf and that girl, think what it could mean. For instance, it could mean that the girl was yours, and Kampf took her away from you, and that was why you killed him when he came here yesterday."

"She wasn't my girl!"

"Uh-huh. Or it could mean that although she wasn't yours, you were under a deep obligation to her, and Kampf had given her a dirty deal; or he was threatening her with something, and she wanted him disposed of, and you obliged. Or of course it could be merely that Kampf had something on you."

"You're in the wrong racket," he sneered. "You ought to be writing TV scripts."

I stuck with him only a few more minutes, having got all I could hope for under the circumstances. Since I was letting him assume that I was a city employee, I couldn't very well try to pry him loose for a trip to Wolfe's place. Also, I had two more calls to make, and there was no telling when I might be interrupted by a phone call or a courier to one of them from downtown. So I left.

I went down a flight to Meegan's door, and knocked, and waited. Just as I was raising a fist to make it louder and better, there were footsteps inside, and the door opened. Meegan was still in his shirt sleeves and still uncombed.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Back again," I said, firmly but not offensively. "With a few questions. If you don't mind?"

"I certainly do mind."

"Naturally. Mr. Talento has been called down to the District Attorney's office. This might possibly save you another trip there."

He side-stepped and I went in. The room was the same size and shape as Aland's, above, and the furniture, though different, was no more desirable. The table against a wall was lopsided, probably the one that Jewel Jones hoped they had fixed for him. I took a chair beside it, and he took another and sat frowning at me.

"Haven't I seen you before?" he wanted to know.

"Sure, we were here with the dog."

A Dog in the Daytime

"I mean before that. Wasn't it you in Nero Wolfe's office yesterday?"

"That's right."

"How come?"

I raised my eyebrows. "Haven't you got the lines crossed, Mr. Meegan? I'm here to ask questions, not to answer them. I was in Wolfe's office on business. I often am. Now——"

"He's a fat, arrogant half-wit!"

"You may be right. He's certainly arrogant. Now I'm here on business." I got out my notebook and pencil. "You moved into this place nine days ago. Please tell me exactly how you came to take this apartment."

He glared. "I've told it at least three times."

"I know. This is the way it's done. I'm not trying to catch you in some little discrepancy, but you could have omitted something important. Just assume I haven't heard it before. Go ahead."

He groaned and dropped his head on his hands. Normally, he might not have been a bad-looking guy, with his blond hair and grey eyes and long, bony face; but now, having spent most of the night with Homicide and the D.A., he looked it, especially his eyes, which were red and puffy.

He lifted his head. "I'm a commercial photographer. In Pittsburgh. Two years ago I married a girl named Margaret Ryan. Seven months later she left me. I didn't know whether she went alone or with somebody. She just left. She left Pittsburgh, too—at least I couldn't find her there—and her family never saw her or heard from her. About five months later, about a year ago, a client of mine came back from a trip to New York and said he saw her in a theatre here with a man. He spoke to her, but she claimed he was mistaken. He was sure it was her. I came to New York and spent a week looking around, but didn't find her. I didn't go to the police, because I didn't want to. You want a better reason, but that's mine."

"I'll skip that." I was writing in the notebook. "Go ahead."

"Two weeks ago I went to look at a show of pictures at the Fillmore Gallery in Pittsburgh. There was a painting there—an oil—a big one. It was called 'Three Young Mares at Pasture', and it was an

interior, a room, with three women in it. One of them was on a couch, and two of them were on a rug on the floor. They were eating apples. The one on the couch was my wife. I was sure of it the minute I saw her, and after I stood and studied it I was surer than ever. There was absolutely no doubt of it."

"We're not challenging that," I assured him. "What did you do?"

"The artist's signature was Ross Chaffee. I went to the gallery office and asked about him. They thought he lived in New York. I had some work on hand I had to finish, and then I came to New York.

"I had no trouble finding Ross Chaffee; he was in the phone book. I went to see him at his studio, here in this house. First, I told him I was interested in that figure in his painting, that I thought she would be just right to model for some photographs I wanted to do, but he said that his opinion of photography as an art medium was such that he wouldn't care to supply models for it. He was bowing me out, so I told him how it was. I told him the whole thing. Then he was different. He sympathized with me and said he would be glad to help me if he could, but he had painted that picture more than a year ago, and he used so many different models for his pictures that it was impossible to remember which was which."

Meegan stopped, and I looked up from the notebook. He said aggressively, "I'm repeating that that sounded phony to me."

"Go right ahead. You're telling it."

"I say it was phony. A photographer might use hundreds of models in a year, and he might forget, but not a painter. Not a picture like that. I got a little tactless with him, and then I apologized. He said he might be able to refresh his memory and asked me to phone him the next day. Instead of phoning I went back the next day to see him, but he said he simply couldn't remember and doubted if he ever could. I didn't get tactless again. Coming in the house, I had noticed a sign that there was a furnished apartment to let, and when I left Chaffee I found the janitor and rented it, and moved in. I knew my wife had modelled for that picture, and I knew I could find her. I wanted to be as close as I could to Chaffee and the people who came to see him."

A Dog in the Daytime

I wanted something, too. I wanted to say that he must have had a photograph of his wife along and I would like to see it, but of course I didn't dare; it was a cinch that he had already either given it to the cops, or refused to, or claimed he didn't have one. So I merely asked, "What progress did you make?"

"Not much. I tried to get friendly with Chaffee, but I didn't get very far. I met the other two tenants, Talento and Aland, but that didn't get me anywhere. Finally I decided I would have to get some expert help, and that was why I went to see Nero Wolfe. You were there, so you know how that came out—that big blob!"

I nodded. "He has dropsy of the ego. What did you want him to do?"

"I've told you."

"Tell it again."

"I was going to have him tap Chaffee's phone."

"That's illegal," I said severely.

"All right; I didn't do it."

I flipped a page of the notebook. "Go back a little. During that week, besides the tenants here, how many of Chaffee's friends and acquaintances did you meet?"

"Just two, as I've told you. A young woman, a model, in his studio one day—I don't remember her name—and a man Chaffee said buys his pictures. His name was Braunstein."

"You're leaving out Philip Kampf."

Meegan leaned forward and put a fist on the table. "Yes, and I'm going on leaving him out. I never saw him or heard of him."

"What would you say if I said you were seen with him?"

"I'd say you were a dirty liar!" The red eyes looked redder. "As if I wasn't already having enough trouble, now you set on me about the murder of a man I never heard of! You bring a dog here and tell me to pat it!"

I nodded. "That's your hard luck, Mr. Meegan. You're not the first man who's had a murder for company without inviting it." I closed the notebook and put it in my pocket. I rose. "Stick around, please. You may be wanted downtown again."

I would have liked to get more details of his progress, or lack of progress, with Ross Chaffee, and his contacts with the other two

tenants, but it seemed more important to have some words with Chaffee before I got interrupted. As I mounted the two flights to the top floor my wrist watch said twenty-eight minutes past ten.

"I know there's no use complaining," Ross Chaffee said, "about these interruptions to my work. Under the circumstances." He was being very gracious about it.

The top floor was quite different from the others. I don't know what his living quarters in front were like, but the studio, in the rear, was big and high and anything but crummy. There were pieces of sculpture around, big and little, and canvases of all sizes were stacked and propped against racks. The walls were covered with drapes, solid grey, with nothing on them. Each of two easels, one much larger than the other, held a canvas that had been worked on. There were several plain chairs and two upholstered ones, and an oversized divan.

I had been steered to one of the upholstered numbers, and Chaffee, still in his smock, had moved a plain one to sit facing me.

"Only don't prolong it unnecessarily," he requested.

I said I wouldn't. "There are a couple of points," I told him, "that we wonder about a little. Of course, it could be merely a coincidence that Richard Meegan came to town looking for his wife, and came to see you, and rented an apartment here, just nine days before Kampf was murdered, but a coincidence like that will have to stand some going over. Frankly, Mr. Chaffee, there are those—and I happen to be one of them—who find it hard to believe that you couldn't remember who modelled for an important figure in a picture you painted."

Chaffee was smiling. "Then you must think I'm lying."

"I didn't say so."

"But you do, of course." He shrugged. "To what end? What deep design am I cherishing?"

"I wouldn't know. You say you wanted to help Meegan find his wife."

"No, not that I wanted to. I was willing to. He is a horrible nuisance."

A Dog in the Daytime

"It should be worth some effort to get rid of him. Have you made any?"

"I have explained what I did. In a statement, and signed it. I have nothing to add. I tried to refresh my memory. One of your colleagues suggested that I might have gone to Pittsburgh to look at the picture. I suppose he was being funny."

A flicker of annoyance in his fine dark eyes warned me that I was supposed to have read his statement.

I gave him an earnest eye. "Look, Mr. Chaffee. This thing is bad for all concerned. It will get worse instead of better until we find out who killed Kampf. You men in this house must know things about one another, and maybe some things connected with Kampf, that you're not telling. I don't expect a man like you to pass out dirt just for the fun of it, but any dirt that's connected with this murder is going to come out, and if you are keeping any to yourself, you're a bigger fool than you look."

"Quite a speech." He was smiling again.

"Thanks. Now you make one."

"I'm not as eloquent as you are." He shook his head. "No. I don't believe I can help you any. I can't say I'm a total stranger to dirt—that would be smug; but what you're after—no. You have my opinion of Kampf, whom I knew quite well; he was in some respects admirable, but he had his full share of faults. I would say approximately the same of Talento. I have known Aland only casually. I know no more of Meegan than you do. I haven't the slightest notion why any of them might have wanted to kill Philip Kampf. If you expect——"

A phone rang. Chaffee crossed to a table at the end of the divan and answered it. He told it "Yes" a couple of times, and then: "But one of your men is here now. . . . I don't know his name; I didn't ask him. . . . He may be; I don't know. . . . Very well. The District Attorney's office. . . . Yes, I can leave in a few minutes."

He hung up and turned to me. I spoke first, on my feet: "So they want you at the D.A.'s office. Don't tell them I said so, but they'd rather keep a murder in the file till the cows come home than have the squad crack it. If they want my name they know where to ask."

I marched to the door, opened it, and was gone.

I was relieved to find the cab still waiting with its passenger perched on the seat looking out at the scenery. Jet seemed pleased to see me, and during the drive to 35th Street he sat with his rump braced against me for a buttress. The meter said only six dollars and something, but I didn't request any change from the ten I had given the driver. If Wolfe wanted to put me to work on a murder merely because he was infatuated with a dog, let it cost him something.

I noticed that when we entered the office Jet went over to Wolfe, behind his desk, without any sign of bashfulness or uncertainty, proving that the evening before, during my absence, Wolfe had made approaches; probably had fed him something, possibly had even patted him. Remarks occurred to me, but I saved them. I might be called on before long to spend some valuable time demonstrating that I had not been guilty of impersonating an officer, and that it wasn't my fault if the murder suspects mistook me for one.

Wolfe inquired, "Well?"

I reported. The situation called for a full and detailed account, and I supplied it, while Wolfe leaned back with his eyes closed. When I came to the end he asked no questions. Instead, he opened his eyes, and began, "Call the——"

I cut him off: "Wait a minute. After a hard morning's work I claim the satisfaction of suggesting it myself. I thought of it long ago. I'll call the gallery in Pittsburgh where Caffee's picture was shown."

"Indeed. It's a shot at random."

"I know it is but I'm calling anyway."

I reached for the phone on my desk and got through to the Fillmore Gallery in no time, but it took a quarter of an hour, with relays to three different people, to get what I was after. I hung up and turned to Wolfe:

"The show ended a week ago yesterday. And I won't have to go to Pittsburgh. The picture was lent by Mr. Herman Braunstein of New York, who owns it. It was shipped back to him by express four days ago. They wouldn't give me Braunstein's address."

"The phone book."

I had it and was flipping the pages. "Here we are. Business on Broad Street, residence on Park Avenue. There's only one Herman."

"Get him."

"I don't think so. It might take all day. Why don't I go to the residence without phoning? The picture's probably there, and if I can't get in you can fire me. I'm thinking of resigning anyhow."

He had his doubts, since it was my idea, but he bought it. After considering the problem a little, I went to the cabinet beneath the bookshelves, got out the Veblex camera, with accessories, and slung the strap of the case over my shoulder. Before going I dialled Talento's number, to tell him not to bother to keep his appointment, but there was no answer. Either he was still engaged at the D.A.'s office or he was on his way to 35th Street, and if he came during my absence that was all right, since Jet was there to protect Wolfe.

A taxi took me to the end of a sidewalk canopy in front of one of the palace hives on Park Avenue in the Seventies, and I undertook to walk past the doorman without giving him a glance, but he stopped me. I said professionally, "Braunstein, taking pictures, I'm late," and kept going, and got away with it. I crossed the luxurious lobby to the elevator, which luckily was there with the door open, said, "Braunstein, please," and the operator shut the door and pulled the lever. We stopped at the twelfth floor, and I stepped out. There was a door to the right and another to the left. I turned right without asking, on a fifty-fifty chance, listening for a possible correction from the elevator man, who was standing by with his door open.

It was one of the simplest chores I have ever performed. In answer to my ring, the door was opened by a middle-aged female husky, in uniform with apron, and when I told her I had come to take a picture she let me in, asked me to wait, and disappeared. In a couple of minutes a tall and dignified dame with white hair came through an arch and asked what I wanted. I apologized for disturbing her and said I would deeply appreciate it if she would let me take a picture of a painting which had recently been shown at a Pittsburgh gallery, on loan by Mr. Braunstein. It was called "Three Young Mares at Pasture". A Pittsburgh client of mine had admired it, and had intended to go back and photograph it for his collection, but the picture was gone before he had got around to it.

She wanted some information, such as my name and address and

the name of my Pittsburgh client, which I supplied gladly without a script, and then she led me through the arch into a room not quite as big as Madison Square Garden. It would have been a pleasure, and also instructive, to do a little glomming at the rugs and furniture and especially the dozen or more pictures on the walls, but that would have to wait.

She went across to a picture near the far end, said, "That's it," and lowered herself onto a chair.

It was a nice picture. I had half expected the mares to be without clothes, but they were fully dressed. Remarking that I didn't wonder that my client wanted a photograph of it, I got busy with my equipment, including flash bulbs. She sat and watched. I took four shots from slightly different angles, acting and looking professional, I hoped. Then I thanked her warmly on behalf of my client, promised to send her some prints, and left.

That was all there was to it.

Out on the sidewalk again, I walked west to Madison, turned downtown, and found a drug store. I went into the phone booth, and dialled a number.

Wolfe's voice came: "Yes? Whom do you want?"

I've told him a hundred times that's no way to answer the phone, but he's too pigheaded.

I spoke: "I want you. I've seen the picture, and it glows with colour and life; the blood seems to pulsate under the warm skin. The shadows are transparent, with a harmonious blending——"

"Shut up! Yes or no?"

"Yes. You have met Mrs. Meegan. Would you like to meet her again?"

"I would. Get her."

I didn't have to look in the phone book for her address, having already done so.

I left the drug store and flagged a taxi. . . .

There was no doorman problem at the number on East Fortyninth Street. It was an old brick house that had been painted a bright yellow and modernized, but getting in was a little complicated. Pressing the button marked *Jewel Jones* in the vestibule was easy enough, but then it got more difficult.

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A voice crackled from the grille: "Yes?"

"Miss Jones?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"Archie Goodwin. I want to see you."

"What do you want?"

"Let me in and I'll tell you."

"No. What is it?"

"It's very personal. If you don't want to hear it from me I'll go and bring Richard Meegan, and maybe you'll tell him."

I heard the startled exclamation. After a pause: "Why do you say that? I told you I don't know any Meegan."

"You're 'way behind. I just saw a picture called 'Three Young Mares at Pasture'. Let me in."

I turned and put my hand on the knob. There was a click, and I pushed the door and entered. I crossed the little lobby to the self-service elevator, pushed the button marked 5, and ascended. When it stopped, I opened the door and emerged into a tiny foyer. A door was standing open, and on the sill was Miss Jones in a giddy *négligée*. She started to say something, but I rudely ignored it.

"Listen," I said; "there's no sense in prolonging this. Last night I gave you your pick between Mr. Wolfe and Sergeant Stebbins; now it's either Mr. Wolfe or Meegan. I should think you'd prefer Mr. Wolfe, because he's the kind of man who understands; you said so yourself. I'll wait here while you change, but don't try phoning anybody, because you won't know where you are until you've talked with Mr. Wolfe—and also because their wires are probably tapped."

She stepped to me and put a hand on my arm. "Archie, where did you see the picture?"

"I'll tell you on the way down. Let's go."

She gave the arm a gentle tug. "You don't have to wait out here. Come in and sit down."

I patted her fingers, not wishing to be boorish. "Sorry," I told her, "but I'm afraid of young mares. One kicked me once."

She turned and disappeared into the apartment, leaving the door open.

"Don't call me Mrs. Meegan!" Jewel Jones cried.

Wolfe was in as bad a humour as she was. True, she had been hopelessly cornered, with no weapons within reach, but he had been compelled to tell Fritz to postpone lunch until further notice.

"I was only," he said crustily, "stressing the fact that your identity is not a matter for discussion. Legally, you are Mrs. Richard Meegan. That understood, I'll call you anything you say. Miss Jones?"

"Yes." She was on the red-leather chair, but not in it. Perched on its edge, she looked as if she were set to spring up and scoot any second.

"Very well." Wolfe regarded her. "You realize, madam, that everything you say will be received sceptically. You are a competent liar. Your offhand denial of acquaintance with Mr. Meegan last night was better than competent. Now. When did Mr. Chaffee tell you that your husband was in town looking for you?"

"I didn't say Mr. Chaffee told me."

"Someone did. Who and when?"

She was hanging on. "How do you know someone did?"

He wagged a finger at her. "I beg you, Miss Jones, to realize the pickle you're in. It is not credible that Mr. Chaffee couldn't remember the name of the model for that figure in his picture. The police don't believe it, and they haven't the advantage of knowing, as I do, that it was you and that you lived in that house for a year, and that you still see Mr. Chaffee occasionally. When your husband came and asked Mr. Chaffee for the name of the model, and Mr. Chaffee pleaded a faulty memory, and your husband rented an apartment there and made it plain that he intended to persevere, it is preposterous to suppose that Mr. Chaffee didn't tell you. I don't envy you your tussles with the police after they learn about you."

"They don't have to learn about me, do they?"

"Pfui. I'm surprised they haven't got to you already, though it's been only eighteen hours. They soon will, even if not through me. I know this is no frolic for you, here with me, but they will almost make it seem so."

She was thinking. Her brow was wrinkled and her eyes stared straight at Wolfe. "Do you know," she asked, "what I think would

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be the best thing? I don't know why I didn't think of it before. You're a detective, you're an expert at helping people in trouble, and I'm certainly in trouble. I'll pay you to help me. I could pay you a little now."

"Not now or ever, Miss Jones." Wolfe was blunt. "When did Mr. Chaffee tell you that your husband was here looking for you?"

"You won't even listen to me," she complained.

"Talk sense and I will. When?"

She edged back on the chair an inch. "You don't know my husband. He was jealous about me even before we married, and then he was worse. It got so bad I couldn't stand it, and that was why I left him. I knew if I stayed in Pittsburgh he would find me and kill me, so I came to New York. A friend of mine had come here—I mean just a friend. I got a job at a modelling agency and made enough to live on, and I met a lot of people. Ross Chaffee was one of them, and he wanted to use me in a picture and I let him. Of course, he paid me, but that wasn't so important, because soon after that I met Phil Kampf, and he got me a tryout at a night club and I made it. About then I had a scare, though. A man from Pittsburgh saw me at a theatre and spoke to me, but I told him he was wrong, that I had never been in Pittsburgh."

"That was a year ago," Wolfe muttered.

"Yes. I was a little leery about the night club, appearing in public like that, but months went by and nothing happened. And then all of a sudden Ross Chaffee phoned me that my husband had come and asked about the picture. I begged him not to tell him who it was, and he promised he wouldn't. You see, you don't know my husband. I knew he was trying to find me so he could kill me."

"You've said that twice. Has he ever killed anybody?"

"I didn't say anybody—I said me. I seem to have an effect on men." She gestured for understanding. "They just go for me." And Dick—well, I know him, that's all. I left him a year and a half ago, and he's still looking for me, and that's what he's like. When Ross told me he was here, I was scared stiff. I quit working at the club because he might happen to go there and see me, and I hardly left my apartment till last night."

Wolfe nodded. "To meet Mr. Talento. What for?"

"I told you."

"Yes, but then you were merely Miss Jones. Now you are also Mrs. Meegan. What for?"

"That doesn't change it any. I had heard on the radio about Phil being killed and I wanted to know about it. I rang Ross Chaffee and I rang Jerry Aland, but neither of them answered; so I rang Vic Talento. He wouldn't tell me anything on the phone, but he said he would meet me."

"Did Mr. Aland and Mr. Talento know you had sat for that picture?"

"Sure they did."

"And that Mr. Meegan had seen it and recognized you, and was here looking for you?"

"Yes, they knew all about it. Ross had to tell them, because he thought Dick might ask them if they knew who had modelled for the picture, and he had to warn them not to tell. They said they wouldn't, and they didn't. They're all good friends of mine."

She stopped to open her black leather bag, took out a purse, and fingered its contents. She raised her eyes to Wolfe. "I can pay you forty dollars now, to start. I'm not just in trouble; I'm in danger of my life, really I am. I don't see how you can refuse—— You're not listening!"

Apparently he wasn't. With his lips pursed, he was watching the tip of his forefinger make little circles on his desk blotter. Her reproach didn't stop him, but after a moment he moved his eyes to me and said abruptly, "Get Mr. Chaffee."

"No!" she cried. "I don't want him to know——"

"Nonsense," he snapped at her. "Everybody will have to know everything, so why drag it out? . . . Get him, Archie. I'll speak to him."

I dialled Chaffee's number. I doubted if he would be back from his session with the D.A., but he was. I pitched my voice low so he wouldn't recognize it, and merely told him that Nero Wolfe wished to speak to him. Wolfe took it at his desk.

"Mr. Chaffee? This is Nero Wolfe. I've assumed an interest in the

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murder of Philip Kampf and have done some investigating. . . . Just one moment, please; don't ring off. Sitting here in my office is Mrs. Richard Meegan, alias Miss Jewel Jones. . . . Please let me finish. I shall, of course, have to detain her and communicate with the police, since they will want her as a material witness in a murder case, but before I do that I would like to discuss the matter with you and the others who live in that house. Will you undertake to bring them here as soon as possible? . . . No, I'll say nothing further on the phone. I want you here, all of you. If Mr. Meegan is balky, you might as well tell him his wife is here——"

She was across to him in a leap that any young mare might have envied, grabbing for the phone and shrieking at it, "Don't tell him, Ross! Don't bring him! Don't——"

My own leap and dash around the end of the desk was fairly good, too. I yanked her back with enough enthusiasm so that I landed in the red-leather chair with her on my lap, and since she was by no means through, I wrapped my arms around her, pinning her arms to her sides, whereupon she started kicking my shins with her heels. She kept on kicking until Wolfe had finished with Chaffee. When he hung up she suddenly went limp against me.

Wolfe scowled at us. "An affecting sight," he snorted.

There were various aspects of the situation. One was lunch. For Wolfe it was unthinkable to have company in the house at mealtime, without feeding him or her, but he certainly wasn't going to sit at table with a female who had just pounced on him and clawed at him. The solution was simple: She and I were served in the dining-room and Wolfe ate in the kitchen with Fritz. We were served, but she didn't eat much. She kept listening and looking toward the hall, though I assured her that care would be taken to see that her husband didn't kill her on these premises.

A second aspect was the reaction of three of the Arbor Street tenants to their discovery of my identity. I handled that myself. When the doorbell rang and I admitted them, at a quarter-past two, I told them I would be glad to discuss my split personality with any or all of them later, if they still wanted to, but they would have to

file it until Wolfe was through. Victor Talento had another beef that he wouldn't file—that I had doublecrossed him on the message he had asked me to take to Jewel Jones. He wanted to get nasty about it and demanded a private talk with Wolfe, but I told him to go climb a rope.

I also had to handle the third aspect, which had two angles. There was Miss Jones's theory that her husband would kill her on sight, which might or might not be well-founded; and there was the fact that one of them had killed Kampf and might go to extremes if pushed. On that I took three precautions: I showed them the Carley .38 I had put in my pocket and told them it was loaded; I insisted on patting them from shoulders to ankles; and I kept Miss Jones in the dining-room until I had them seated in the office, on a row of chairs facing Wolfe's desk. When he was in his chair behind his desk I went across the hall for her and brought her in.

Meegan jumped up and started for us. I stiff-armed him, and made it good. His wife got behind me. Talento and Aland left their chairs, presumably to help protect her. Meegan was shouting, and so were they. I detoured with her around back of them and got her to a chair at the end of my desk, and when I sat down I was in an ideal spot to trip anyone headed for her. Talento and Aland had pulled Meegan down onto a chair between them, and he sat staring at her.

"With that hubbub over," Wolfe said, "I want to be sure I have the names right." His eyes went from left to right. "Talento, Meegan, Aland, Chaffee. Is that correct?"

I told him yes.

"Then I'll proceed." He glanced up at the wall clock. "Twenty hours ago Philip Kampf was killed in the house where you gentlemen live. The circumstances indicate that one of you killed him. But I won't rehash the multifarious details which you have already discussed at length with the police; you are familiar with them. I have not been hired to work on this case; the only client I have is a dog, and he came to my office by chance. However——"

The doorbell rang. I asked myself if I had put the chain bolt on, and decided I had. Through the open door to the hall I saw Fritz

passing to answer it. Wolfe started to go on, but was annoyed by the sound of voices, and stopped. He shut his eyes and compressed his lips, while the audience sat and looked at him.

Then Fritz appeared in the doorway and announced: "Inspector Cramer, sir."

Wolfe's eyes opened. "What does he want?"

"I told him you are engaged. He says he knows you are—that the four men were followed to your house and he was notified. He says he expected you to be trying some trick with the dog, and he knows that's what you are doing, and he intends to come in and see what it is. Sergeant Stebbins is with him."

Wolfe grunted. "Archie, tell— No. You'd better stay where you are. Fritz, tell him he may see and hear what I'm doing, provided he gives me thirty minutes without interruptions or demands. If he agrees to that, bring them in."

"Wait!" Ross Chaffee was on his feet. "You said you would discuss it with us before you communicated with the police."

"I haven't communicated with them. They're here."

"You told them to come!"

"No. I would have preferred to deal with you men first, and then call them, but here they are, and they might as well join us. Bring them, Fritz, on that condition."

"Yes, sir."

Fritz went. Chaffee thought he had something more to say, decided he hadn't, and sat down. Talento said something to him, and he shook his head. Jerry Aland, much more presentable now that he was combed and dressed, kept his eyes fastened on Wolfe. For Meegan, apparently, there was no one in the room but him and his wife.

Cramer and Stebbins marched in, halted three paces from the door, and took a survey.

"Be seated," Wolfe invited them. "Luckily, Mr. Cramer, your usual chair is unoccupied."

"Where's the dog?" Cramer demanded.

"In the kitchen. It's understood that you will be merely a spectator for thirty minutes?"

"That's what I said."

"Then sit down. But you should have one piece of information. You know the gentlemen, of course, but not the lady. Her current name is Miss Jewel Jones. Her legal name is Mrs. Richard Meegan."

"Meegan?" Cramer stared. "The one in the picture Chaffee painted?"

"That's right. Please be seated."

"Where did you get her?"

"That can wait. No interruptions and no demands. Confound it, sit down!"

Cramer went and lowered himself onto the red-leather chairs. Purley Stebbins got one of the yellow ones and planted it behind Chaffee and Aland.

Wolfe regarded the quartet. "I was about to say, gentlemen, that it was something the dog did that pointed to the murderer for me. But before——"

"What did it do?" Cramer cut in.

"You know all about it," Wolfe told him coldly. "Mr. Goodwin related the events to you exactly as they happened. If you interrupt again, by heaven, you can take them all down to headquarters—not including the dog—and stew it out yourself!"

He went back to the four: "But before I come to the dog, another thing or two. I offer no comment on your guile with Mr. Meegan. You were all friends of Miss Jones's, and you refused to disclose her to a husband whom she had abandoned and professed to fear. I will even concede that there was a flavour of gallantry in your conduct. But when Mr. Kampf was murdered and the police swarmed in, it was idiotic to try to keep her out of it. They were sure to get to her. I got to her first, only because of Mr. Goodwin's admirable enterprise and characteristic luck."

He shook his head at them. "It was also idiotic of you to assume that Mr. Goodwin was a police officer, and admit him and answer his questions, merely because he had been present during the abortive experiment with the dog. You should have asked to see his credentials. None of you had any idea who he was. Even Mr. Meegan, who had seen him in this office in the morning, was bamboozled. I

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mention this to anticipate any possible official complaint that Mr. Goodwin impersonated an officer. You know he didn't. He merely took advantage of your unwarranted assumption."

He shifted in his chair. "Another thing: Yesterday morning Mr. Meegan called here by appointment to ask me to do a job for him. With his first words I gathered that it was something about his wife. I don't take that kind of work, and I was blunt with him. He was offended. He rushed out in a temper, grabbing a hat and raincoat from the rack in the hall, and he took Mr. Goodwin's coat instead of his own. Late in the afternoon Mr. Goodwin went to Arbor Street with the coat that had been left in error, to exchange it. He saw that in front of Number 29 there were collected two police cars, a policeman on duty, some people, and a dog. He decided to postpone his errand and went on by, after a brief halt during which he patted the dog. He walked home, and had gone nearly two miles when he discovered that the dog was following him. He brought the dog in a cab the rest of the way, to his house and this room."

He flattened a palm on his desk. "Now. Why did the dog follow Mr. Goodwin through the turmoil of the city? Mr. Cramer's notion that the dog was enticed is poppycock. Mr. Goodwin is willing to believe, as many men are, that he is irresistible both to dogs and to women, and doubtless his vanity impeded his intellect, or he would have reached the same conclusion I did. The dog didn't follow him; it followed the coat. You ask, as I did, how to account for Mr. Kampf's dog following Mr. Meegan's coat. I couldn't. I can't. Then, since it was unquestionably Mr. Kampf's dog, it couldn't have been Mr. Meegan's coat. It is better than a conjecture—it is next thing to a certainty—that it was Mr. Kampf's coat!"

His gaze levelled at the deserted husband. "Mr. Meegan. Some two hours ago I learned from Mr. Goodwin that you maintain that you had never seen or heard of Mr. Kampf. That was fairly conclusive, but before sending for you I had to verify my conjecture that the model who had sat for Mr. Chaffee's picture was your wife. I would like to hear it straight from you. Did you ever meet Philip Kampf alive?"

Meegan was meeting the gaze. "No."

"Don't you want to qualify that?"

"No."

"Then where did you get his raincoat?"

Meegan's jaw worked. He said, "I didn't have his raincoat, or if I did I didn't know it."

"That won't do. I warn you, you are in deadly peril. The raincoat that you brought into this house and left here is in the hall now, there on the rack. It can easily be established that it belonged to Mr. Kampf and was worn by him. Where did you get it?"

Meegan's jaw worked some more. "I never had it, if it belonged to Kampf. This is a dirty frame. You can't prove that's the coat I left here."

Wolfe's voice sharpened: "One more chance. Have you any explanation of how Kampf's coat came into your possession?"

"No, and I don't need any."

He may not have been pure boob. If he hadn't noticed that he wore the wrong coat home—and he probably hadn't, in his state of mind—this had hit him from a clear sky and he had no time to study it.

"Then you're done for," Wolfe told him. "For your own coat must be somewhere, and I think I know where. In the police laboratory. Mr. Kampf was wearing one when you killed him and pushed his body down the stairs—and that explains why, when they were making that experiment this morning, the dog showed no interest in the spot where the body had lain. It had been enveloped, not in his coat but in yours. If you won't explain how you got Mr. Kampf's coat, then explain how he got yours. Is that also a frame?"

Wolfe pointed a finger at him. "I note that flash of hope in your eye, and I think I know what it means. But your brain is lagging. If, after killing Kampf, you took your raincoat off of him and put on him the one that you thought was his, that won't help you any. For in that case the coat that was on the body is Mr. Goodwin's, and certainly that can be established, and how would you explain that? It looks hopeless, and——"

Meegan was springing up, but before he even got well started Purley's big hands were on his shoulders, pulling him back and down.

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And Jewel Jones was babbling, "I told you he would kill me! I knew he would! He killed Phil!"

Wolfe snapped at her, "How do you know he did?"

Judging by her eyes and the way she was shaking, she would be hysterical in another two minutes. Meanwhile, she poured it out:

"Because Phil told me—he told me he knew Dick was here looking for me, and he knew how afraid I was of him, and he said if I wouldn't come back to him he would tell Dick where I was. I didn't think he really would—I didn't think Phil could be as mean as that—and I wouldn't promise.

"But yesterday morning he phoned me and told me he had seen Dick and told him he thought he knew who had posed for that picture. He said he was going to see him again in the afternoon and tell him about me if I didn't promise, and so I promised. I thought if I promised, it would give me time to decide what to do. But Phil must have gone to see Dick again, anyway."

"Where had they met in the morning?"

"At Phil's apartment, he said. And he said—that's why I know Dick killed him—he said Dick had gone off with his raincoat, and he laughed about it and said he was willing for Dick to have his raincoat if he could have Dick's wife." She was shaking harder now. "And I'll bet that's what he told Dick! I'll bet he said I was coming back to him and he thought that was a good trade—a raincoat for a wife! That was like Phil!"

She giggled. It started with a giggle, and then the valves burst open and here it came. When something happens in that office to smash a woman's nerves—as it has more than once—it usually falls to me to deal with it. But that time three other guys, led by Ross Chaffee, were on hand, and I was glad to leave Jewel Jones to them. As for Wolfe, he skedaddled. If there is one thing on earth he absolutely will not be in a room with, it's a woman in eruption. He got up and marched out. As for Meegan, Purley and Cramer had him.

When they left with him, they didn't take the dog. To relieve the minds of any of you who have the notion, which I understand is widespread, that it makes a dog neurotic to change its name, I might

add that he responds to "Jet" now as if his mother had started calling him that before he had his eyes open.

As for the raincoat, Wolfe had been right about the flash in Meegan's eye. Kampf had been wearing Meegan's raincoat when he was killed, and of course that wouldn't do, so after strangling him Meegan had taken it off and put on the one he thought was Kampf's. Only, it was mine. As a part of the D.A.'s case I went down to headquarters and identified it. At the trial it helped the jury to decide that Meegan deserved the big one. After that was over I suppose I could have claimed it, but the idea didn't appeal to me. My new coat is a different colour.

The Enemy

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

They sat late at the lunch table and afterwards moved through the dim, cool, high-ceilinged rooms to the Judge's library where, in their quiet talk, the old man's past and the young man's future seemed to telescope and touch. But at twenty minutes after three, on that hot, bright, June Saturday afternoon, the present tense erupted. Out in the quiet street arose the sound of trouble.

Judge Kittinger adjusted his pince-nez, rose, and led the way to his old-fashioned veranda from which they could overlook the tree-roofed intersection of Greenwood Lane and Hannibal Street. Near the steps to the corner house, opposite, there was a surging knot of children and one man. Now, from the house on the Judge's left, a woman in a blue house dress ran diagonally toward the excitement. And a police car slipped up Hannibal Street, gliding to the kerb. One tall officer plunged into the group and threw restraining arms around a screaming boy.

Mike Russell, saying to his host, "Excuse me, sir," went rapidly across the street. Trouble's centre was the boy, ten or eleven years, a tow-headed boy, with tawny-lashed blue eyes, a straight nose, a fine brow. He was beside himself, writhing in the policeman's grasp. The woman in the blue dress was yammering at him, "Freddy! Freddy! Freddy!" Her voice simply did not reach his ears.

"You ole stinker! You rotten ole stinker! You ole nut!" All the boy's heart was in the epithets.

"Now, listen . . ." The cop shook the boy who, helpless in those powerful hands, yet blazed. His fury had stung to crimson the face of the grown man at whom it was directed.

Charlotte Armstrong

This man, who stood with his back to the house as one besieged, was plump, half-bald, with eyes much magnified by glasses. "Attacked me!" he cried in a high whine. "Rang my bell and absolutely leaped on me!"

Out of the seven or eight small boys clustered around them came overlapping fragments of shrill sentences. It was clear only that they opposed the man. A small woman in a print dress, a man in shorts, whose bare chest was winter-white, stood a little apart, hesitant and distressed. Up on the veranda of the house the screen door was half-open, and a woman seated in a wheelchair peered forth anxiously.

On the green grass, in the shade, perhaps thirty feet away, there lay in death a small brown-and-white dog.

The Judge's luncheon guest observed all this. When the Judge drew near, there was a lessening of the noise. Judge Kittinger said, "This is Freddy Titus, isn't it? Mr. Matlin? What's happened?"

The man's head jerked. "I," he said, "did nothing to the dog. Why would I trouble to hurt the boy's dog? I try—you know this, Judge—I try to live in peace here. But these kids are terrors! They've made this block a perfect hell for me and my family." The man's voice shook. "My wife, who is not strong . . . My step-daughter, who is a cripple . . . These kids are no better than a slum gang. They are vicious! That boy rang my bell and *attacked* . . . I'll have him up for assault! I . . ."

The Judge's face was old ivory and he was aloof behind it.

On the porch a girl pushed past the woman in the chair, a girl who walked with a lurching gait.

Mike Russell asked, quietly, "Why do the boys say it was you, Mr. Matlin, who hurt the dog?"

The kids chorused. "He's an ole mean . . ." "He's a nut . . ." "Just because . . ." " . . . took Clive's bat and . . ." " . . . chases us . . ." " . . . tries to put everything on us . . ." " . . . told my mother lies . . ." " . . . just because . . ."

He is our enemy, they were saying; *he is our enemy*.

"They . . ." began Matlin, his throat thick with anger.

"Hold it a minute." The second cop, the thin one, walked toward where the dog was lying.

The Enemy

"Somebody," said Mike Russell in a low voice, "must do something for the boy."

The Judge looked down at the frantic child. He said, gently, "I am as sorry as I can be, Freddy. . . ." But in his old heart there was too much known, and too many little dogs he remembered that had already died, and even if he were as sorry as he could be, he couldn't be sorry enough. The boy's eyes turned, rejected, returned. To the enemy.

Russell moved near the woman in blue, who pertained to this boy somehow. "His mother?"

"His folks are away. I'm there to take care of him," she snapped, as if she felt herself put upon by a crisis she had not contracted to face.

"Can they be reached?"

"No," she said decisively.

The young man put his stranger's hand on the boy's rigid little shoulder. But he, too, was rejected. Freddy's eyes, brilliant with hatred, clung to the enemy. Hatred doesn't cry.

"Listen," said the tall cop, "if you could hang onto him for a minute . . ."

"Not I . . ." said Russell.

The thin cop came back. "Looks like the dog got poison. When was he found?"

"Just now," the kids said.

"Where? There?"

"Up Hannibal Street. Right on the edge of ole Matlin's back lot."

"Edge of *my* lot!" Matlin's colour freshened again. "On the sidewalk, why don't you say? Why don't you tell the truth?"

"We are! *We* don't tell lies!"

"Quiet, you guys," the cop said. "Pipe down, now."

"Heaven's my witness, I wasn't even here!" cried Matlin. "I played nine holes of golf to-day. I didn't get home until . . . May?" he called over his shoulder. "What time did I come in?"

The girl on the porch came slowly down, moving awkwardly on her uneven legs. She was in her twenties, no child. Nor was she a

Charlotte Armstrong

woman. She said in a blurting manner, "About three o'clock, Daddy Earl. But the dog was dead."

"What's that, Miss?"

"This is my step-daughter . . ."

"The dog was dead," the girl said, "before he came home. I saw it from upstairs, before three o'clock. Lying by the sidewalk."

"You drove in from Hannibal Street, Mr. Matlin? Looks like you'd have seen the dog."

Matlin said with nervous thoughtfulness, "I don't know. My mind . . . Yes, I . . ."

"He's telling a lie!"

"Freddy!"

"Listen to that," said May Matlin, "will you?"

"She's a liar, too!"

The cop shook Freddy. Mr. Matlin made a sound of helpless exasperation. He said to the girl, "Go keep your mother inside, May." He raised his arm as if to wave. "It's all right, honey," he called to the woman in the chair, with a false cheeriness that grated on the ear. "There's nothing to worry about, now."

Freddy's jaw shifted and young Russell's watching eyes winced. The girl began to lurch back to the house.

"It was my wife who put in the call," Matlin said. "After all, they were on me like a pack of wolves. Now, I . . . I *understand* that the boy's upset. But all the same, he cannot . . . He must learn . . . I will not have . . . I have enough to contend with, without this malice, this unwarranted antagonism, this persecution . . ."

Freddy's eyes were unwinking.

"It has got to stop!" said Matlin, almost hysterically.

"Yes," murmured Mike Russell, "I should think so." Judge Kittinger's white head, nodding, agreed.

"We've heard about quite a few dog-poisoning cases over the line in Redfern," said the thin cop with professional calm. "None here."

The man in the shorts hitched **them** up, looking shocked. "Who'd do a thing like that?"

A boy said, boldly, "Ole Matlin would." He had an underslung

The Enemy

aw and wore spectacles on his snub nose. "I'm Phil Bourchard," he said to the cop. He had courage.

"We jist know," said another. "I'm Ernie Allen." Partisanship radiated from his whole thin body. "Ole Matlin doesn't want anybody on his ole property."

"Sure." "He doesn't want anybody on his ole property." "It was ole Matlin."

"It was. It was," said Freddy Titus.

"Freddy," said the housekeeper in blue, "now, you better be still. I'll tell your Dad." It was a meaningless fumble for control. The boy didn't even hear it.

Judge Kittinger tried, patiently. "You can't accuse without cause, Freddy."

"Bones didn't hurt his ole property. Bones wouldn't hurt anything. Ole Matlin did it."

"You lying little devil!"

"*He's* a liar!"

The cop gave Freddy another shake. "You kids found him, eh?"

"We were up at Bourchard's and were going down to the Titus house."

"And he was dead," said Freddy.

"I know nothing about it," said Matlin icily. "Nothing at all."

The cop, standing between, said wearily, "Any of you people see what coulda happened?"

"I was sitting in my backyard," said the man in shorts. "I'm Daugherty, next door, up Hannibal Street. Didn't see a thing."

The small woman in a print dress spoke up. "I am Mrs. Page. I live across on the corner, Officer. I believe I did see a strange man go into Mr. Matlin's driveway this morning."

"When was this, Ma'am?"

"About eleven o'clock. He was poorly dressed. He walked up the drive and around the garage."

"Didn't he go to the house?"

"No. He was only there a minute. I believe he was carrying something. He was rather furtive. And very poorly dressed, almost like a tramp."

Charlotte Armstrong

There was a certain relaxing, among the elders. "Ah, the tramp," said Mike Russell. "The good old reliable tramp. Are you sure, Mrs. Page? It's very unlikely . . ."

But she bristled. "Do you think I am lying?"

Russell's lips parted, but he felt the Judge's hand on his arm. "This is my guest, Mr. Russell . . . Freddy." The Judge's voice was gentle. "Let him go, Officer. I'm sure he understands, now. Mr. Matlin was not even at home, Freddy. It's possible that this . . . er . . . stranger . . . Or it may have been an accident . . ."

"Wasn't a tramp. Wasn't an accident."

"You can't know that, boy," said the Judge, somewhat sharply. Freddy said nothing. As the officer slowly released his grasp, the boy took a free step, backward, and the other boys surged to surround him. There stood the enemy, the monster who killed and lied, and the grown-ups with their reasonable doubts were on the monster's side. But the boys knew what Freddy knew. They stood together.

"Somebody," murmured the Judge's guest, "somebody's got to help the boy." And the Judge sighed.

The cops went up Hannibal Street, towards Matlin's back lot, with Mr. Daugherty. Matlin lingered at the corner talking to Mrs. Page. In the front window of Matlin's house the curtain fell across the glass.

Mike Russell sidled up to the housekeeper. "Any uncles or aunts here in town? A grandmother?"

"No," she said, shortly.

"Brothers or sisters, Mrs. . . .?"

"Miz Somers. No, he's the only one. Only reason they didn't take him along was it's the last week of school and he didn't want to miss."

Mike Russell's brown eyes suggested the soft texture of velvet, and they were deeply distressed. She slid away from their appeal. "He'll just have to take it, I guess, like everybody else," Mrs. Somers said. "These things happen."

He was listening intently. "Don't you care for dogs?"

"I don't mind a dog," she said. She arched her neck. She was going to call to the boy.

The Enemy

"Wait. Tell me, does the family go to church? Is there a pastor or a priest who knows the boy?"

"They don't go, far as I ever saw." She looked at him as if he were an eccentric.

"Then school. He has a teacher. What grade?"

"Sixth grade," she said. "Miss Dana. Oh, he'll be O.K." Her voice grew loud, to reach the boy and hint to him. "He's a big boy."

Russell said, desperately, "Is there no way to telephone his parents?"

"They're on the road. They'll be in some time to-morrow. That's all I know." She was annoyed. "I'll take care of him. That's why I'm here." She raised her voice and this time it was arch and seductive. "Freddy, better come wash your face. I know where there's some chocolate cookies."

The velvet left the young man's eyes. Hard as buttons, they gazed for a moment at the woman. Then he whipped around and left her. He walked over to where the kids had drifted, near the little dead creature on the grass. He said softly, "Bones had his own doctor, Freddy? Tell me his name?" The boy's eyes flickered. "We must know what it was that he took. A doctor can tell. I think his own doctor would be best, don't you?"

The boy nodded, mumbled a name, an address. That Russell mastered the name and the numbers, asking for no repetition, was a sign of his concern. Besides, it was this young man's quality—that he listened. "May I take him, Freddy? I have a car. We ought to have a blanket," he added softly, "a soft, clean blanket."

"I got one, Freddy . . ." "My mother'd let me . . ."

"I can get one," Freddy said brusquely. They wheeled, almost in formation.

Mrs. Somers frowned. "You must let them take a blanket," Russell warned her, and his eyes were cold.

"I will explain to Mrs. Titus," said the Judge quickly.

"Quite a fuss," she said, and tossed her head and crossed the road.

Russell gave the Judge a quick nervous grin. He walked to the returning cops. "You'll want to run tests, I suppose? Can the dog's own vet do it?"

Charlotte Armstrong

"Certainly. Humane officer will have to be in charge. But that's what the vet'll want."

"I'll take the dog, then. Any traces up there?"

"Not a thing."

"Will you explain to the boy that you are investigating?"

"Well, you know how these things go." The cop's feet shuffled. "Humane officer does what he can. Probably, Monday, after we identify the poison, he'll check the drug stores. Usually, if it is a cranky neighbour, he has already put in a complaint about the dog. This Matlin says he never did. The humane officer will get on it, Monday. He's out of town to-day. The devil of these cases, we can't prove a thing, usually. You get an idea who it was, maybe you can scare him. It's a misdemeanour, all right. Never heard of a conviction, myself."

"But will you explain to the boy . . .?" Russell stopped, chewed his lip, and the Judge sighed.

"Yeah, it's tough on a kid," the cop said.

When the Judge's guest came back, it was nearly five o'clock. He said, "I came to say good-bye, sir, and to thank you for the . . ." But his mind wasn't on the sentence and he lost it and looked up.

The Judge's eyes were affectionate. "Worried?"

"Judge, sir," the young man said, "*must* they feed him? Where, sir, in this classy neighbourhood is there an understanding woman's heart? I herded them to that Mrs. Allen. But she winced, sir, and she diverted them. She didn't want to deal with tragedy, didn't want to think about it. She offered cakes and cokes and games."

"But my dear boy . . ."

"What do they teach the kids these days, Judge? To turn away? Put something in your stomach. Take a drink. Play a game. Don't weep for your dead. Just skip it, think about something else."

"I'm afraid the boy's alone," the Judge said gently, "but it's only for the night." His voice was melodious. "Can't be sheltered from grief when it comes. None of us can."

"Excuse me, sir, but I wish he *would* grieve. I wish he would bawl his heart out. Wash out that black hate. I ought to go home. None of

my concern. It's a woman's job." He moved and his hand went toward the phone. "He has a teacher. I can't help feeling concerned, sir. May I try?"

The Judge said, "Of course, Mike," and he put his brittle old bones into a chair.

Mike Russell pried the number out of the Board of Education. "Miss Lillian Dana? My name is Russell. You know a boy named Freddy Titus?"

"Oh, yes. He's in my class." The voice was pleasing.

"Miss Dana, there is trouble. You know Judge Kittinger's house? Could you come there?"

"What is the trouble?"

"Freddy's little dog is dead of poison. I'm afraid Freddy is in a bad state. There is no one to help him. His folks are away. The woman taking care of him," Mike's careful explanatory sentences burst into indignation, "has no more sympathetic imagination than a broken clothes-pole." He heard a little gasp. "I'd like to help him, Miss Dana, but I'm a man and a stranger, and the Judge . . ." He paused.

". . . is old," said the Judge in his chair.

"I'm terribly sorry," the voice on the phone said slowly. "Freddy's a wonderful boy."

"You are his friend?"

"Yes, we are friends."

"Then, could you come? You see, we've got to get a terrible idea out of his head. He thinks a man across the street poisoned his dog on purpose. Miss Dana, *he has no doubt!* And he doesn't cry." She gasped again. "Greenwood Lane," he said, "and Hannibal Street—the southeast corner."

She said, "I'll come. I have a car. I'll come as soon as I can."

Russell turned and caught the Judge biting his lips. "Am I making too much of this, sir?" he inquired humbly.

"I don't like the boy's stubborn conviction." The Judge's voice was dry and clear. "Any more than you do. I agree that he must be brought to understand. But . . ." the old man shifted in the chair. "Of course, the man, Matlin, is a fool, Mike. There is something

solemn and silly about him that makes him fair game. He's unfortunate. He married a widow with a crippled child, and no sooner were they married than *she* collapsed. And he's not well off. He's encumbered with that enormous house."

"What does he do, sir?"

"He's a photographer. Oh, he struggles, tries his best, and all that. But with such tension, Mike. That poor misshapen girl over there tries to keep the house, devoted to her mother. Matlin works hard, is devoted, too. And yet the sum comes out in petty strife, nerves, quarrels, uproar. And certainly it cannot be necessary to feud with children."

"The kids have done their share of that, I'll bet," mused Mike. "The kids are delighted—a neighbourhood ogre, to add the fine flavour of menace. A focus for mischief. An enemy."

"True enough." The Judge sighed.

"So the myth is made. No rumour about ole Matlin loses anything in the telling. I can see it's been built up. You don't knock it down in a day."

"No," said the Judge uneasily. He got up from the chair.

The young man rubbed his dark head. "I don't like it, sir. We don't know what's in the kids' minds, or who their heroes are. There is only the gang. What do you suppose it advises?"

"What could it advise, after all?" said the Judge crisply. "This isn't the slums, whatever Matlin says." He went nervously to the window. He fiddled with the shade pull. He said, suddenly, "From my little summer house in the backyard you can overhear the gang. They congregate under that oak. Go and eavesdrop, Mike."

The young man snapped to attention. "Yes, sir."

"I . . . think we had better know," said the Judge, a trifle sheepishly.

The kids sat under the oak, in a grassy hollow. Freddy was the core. His face was tight. His eyes never left off watching the house of the enemy. The others watched him, or hung their heads, or watched their own brown hands play with the grass.

They were not chattering. There hung about them a heavy, sullen silence, heavy with a sense of tragedy, sullen with a sense of wrong,

and from time to time one voice or another would fling out a pronouncement, which would sink into the silence, thickening its ugliness . . .

The Judge looked up from his paper.

"Could you . . .?"

"I could hear," said Mike in a quiet voice. "They are condemning the law, sir. They call it corrupt. They are quite certain that Matlin killed the dog. They see themselves as Robin Hoods, vigilantes, defending the weak, the wronged, the dog. They think they are discussing justice. They are waiting for dark. They speak of weapons, sir—the only ones they have. B.B. guns, after dark."

"Good heavens!"

"Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to stop it."

Mrs. Somers was cooking supper when he tapped on the screen.

"Oh, it's you. What do you want?"

"I want your help, Mrs. Somers. For Freddy."

"Freddy," she interrupted loudly, with her nose high, "is going to have his supper and go to bed his regular time, and that's all about Freddy. Now, what did you want?"

He said, "I want you to let me take the boy to my apartment for the night."

"I couldn't do that!" She was scandalised.

"The Judge will vouch . . ."

"Now, see here, Mr. what's-your-name—Russell. This isn't my house and Freddy's not my boy. I'm responsible to Mr. and Mrs. Titus. You're a stranger to me. As far as I can see, Freddy is no business of yours whatsoever."

"Which is his room?" asked Mike sharply.

"Why do you want to know?" She was hostile and suspicious.

"Where does he keep his B.B. gun?"

She was startled to an answer. "In the shed out back. Why?"

He told her.

"Kid's talk," she scoffed. "You don't know much about kids, do

you, young man? Freddy will go to sleep. First thing he'll know, it's morning. That's about the size of it."

"You may be right. I hope so."

Mrs. Somers slapped potatoes into the pan. Her lips quivered indignantly. She felt annoyed because she was a little shaken. The strange young man really had hoped so.

Russell scanned the street, went across to Matlin's house. The man himself answered the bell. The air in this house was stale, and bore the faint smell of old grease. There was over everything an atmosphere of struggle and despair. Many things ought to have been repaired and had not been repaired. The place was too big. There wasn't enough money, or strength. It was too much.

Mrs. Matlin could not walk. Otherwise, one saw, she struggled and did the best she could. She had a lost look, as if some anxiety, ever-present, took about nine-tenths of her attention. May Matlin limped in and sat down, lumpishly.

Russell began earnestly, "Mr. Matlin, I don't know how this situation between you and the boys began. I can guess that the kids are much to blame. I imagine they enjoy it." He smiled. He wanted to be sympathetic toward this man.

"Of course they enjoy it." Matlin looked triumphant.

"They call me The Witch," the girl said. "Pretend they're scared of me. The devils. I'm scared of them."

Matlin flicked a nervous eye at the woman in the wheelchair. "The truth is, Mr. Russell," he said in his high whine, "they're vicious."

"It's too bad," said his wife in a low voice. "I think it's dangerous."

"Mama, you mustn't worry," said the girl in an entirely new tone. "I won't let them hurt you. Nobody will hurt you."

"Be quiet, May," said Matlin. "You'll upset her. Of course nobody will hurt her."

"Yes, it is dangerous, Mrs. Matlin," said Russell quietly. "That's why I came over."

Matlin goggled. "What? What's this?"

"Could I possibly persuade you, sir, to spend the night away from this neighbourhood . . . and depart noisily?"

"No," said Matlin, rearing up, his ego bristling, "no, you cannot! I will under no circumstances be driven away from my own home." His voice rose. "Furthermore, I certainly will not leave my wife and step-daughter."

"We could manage, dear," said Mrs. Matlin anxiously.

Russell told them about the talk under the oak, the B.B. gun.

"Devils," said May Matlin, "absolutely . . ."

"Oh, Earl," trembled Mrs. Matlin, "maybe we had all better go away."

Matlin, red-necked, furious, said, "We own this property. We pay our taxes. We have our rights. Let them! Let them try something like that! Then, I think the law would have something to say. This is outrageous! I did not harm that animal. Therefore, I defy . . ." He looked solemn and silly, as the Judge had said, with his face crimson, his weak eyes rolling.

Russell rose. "I thought I ought to make the suggestion," he said mildly, "because it would be the safest thing to do. But don't worry, Mrs. Matlin, because I . . ."

"A B.B. gun can blind . . ." she said tensely.

"Or even worse," Mike agreed. "But I am thinking of the . . ."

"Just a minute," Matlin roared. "You can't come in here and terrify my wife! She is not strong. You have no right." He drew himself up with his feet at a right angle, his pudgy arm extended, his plump jowls quivering. "Get out," he cried. He looked ridiculous.

Whether the young man and the bewildered woman in the chair might have understood each other was not to be known. Russell, of course, got out. May Matlin hobbled to the door and as Russell went through it, she said, "Well, you warned us, anyhow." And her lips came together, sharply.

Russell plodded across the pavement again. Long enchanting shadows from the lowering sun struck aslant through the golden air and all the old houses were gilded and softened in their green setting. He moved toward the big oak. He hunkered down. The sun struck its golden shafts deep under the boughs. "How's it going?" he asked.

Freddy Titus looked frozen and still. "O.K.," said Phil Bourchard with elaborate ease. Light on his owlish glasses hid the eyes.

Charlotte Armstrong

Mike opened his lips, hesitated. Supper time struck on the neighbourhood clock. Calls, like chimes, were sounding.

"... 's my Mom," said Ernie Allen. "See you after."

"See you after, Freddy."

"O.K."

"O.K."

Mrs. Somers' hoot had chimed with the rest and now Freddy got up, stiffly.

"O.K.?" said Mike Russell. The useful syllables that take any meaning at all in American mouths asked, "Are you feeling less bitter, boy? Are you any easier?"

"O.K.," said Freddy. The same syllables shut the man out.

Mike opened his lips. Closed them. Freddy went across the lawn to his kitchen door. There was a brown crockery bowl on the back stoop. His sneaker, rigid on the ankle, stepped over it. Mike Russell watched, and then, with a movement of his arms, almost as if he would wring his hands, he went up the Judge's steps.

"Well?" The Judge opened his door. "Did you talk to the boy?"

Russell didn't answer. He sat down.

The Judge stood over him. "The boy . . . The enormity of this whole idea *must* be explained to him."

"I can't explain," Mike said. "I open my mouth. Nothing comes out."

"Perhaps *I* had better . . ."

"What are you going to say, sir?"

"Why, give him the facts," the Judge cried.

"The facts are . . . the dog is dead."

"There are no facts that point to Matlin."

"There are no facts that point to a tramp, either. That's too sloppy, sir."

"What are you driving at?"

"Judge, the boy is more rightfully suspicious than we are."

"Nonsense," said the Judge. "The girl saw the dog's body before Matlin came . . ."

"There is no alibi for poison," Mike said sadly.

The Enemy

"Are you saying the man is a liar?"

"Liars," sighed Mike. "Truth and lies. How are those kids going to understand, sir? To that Mrs. Page, to the lot of them, Truth is only a subjective intention. 'I am no liar,' sez she, sez he. 'I *intend* to be truthful. So do not insult me.' Lord, when will we begin? It's what we were talking about at lunch, sir. What you and I believe. What the race has been told and told in such agony, in a million years of bitter lesson. *Error*, we were saying. Error is the enemy."

He flung out of the chair. "We know that to tell the truth is not merely a good intention. It's a damned difficult thing to do. It's a skill, to be practised. It's a technique. It's an effort. It takes brains. It takes watching. It takes humility and self-examination. It's a science and an art . . .

"Why don't we tell the *kids* these things? Why is everyone locked up in anger, shouting liar at the other side? Why don't they automatically know how easy it is to be, not wicked, but mistaken? Why is there this notion of violence? Because Freddy doesn't think to himself, 'Wait a minute. I might be wrong.' The habit isn't there. Instead, there are the heroes—the big-muscled, noble-hearted, gun-toting heroes, blind in a righteousness totally arranged by the author. Excuse me, sir."

"All that may be," said the Judge grimly, "and I agree. But the police know the lesson. They . . ."

"They don't care."

"What?"

"Don't care enough, sir. None of us cares enough—about the dog."

"I see," said the Judge. "Yes, I see. We haven't the least idea what happened to the dog." He touched his pince-nez.

Mike rubbed his head wearily. "Don't know what to do except sit under his window the night through. Hardly seems good enough."

The Judge said, simply: "Why don't you find out what happened to the dog?"

The young man's face changed. "What we need, sir," said Mike slowly, "is to teach Freddy how to ask for it. Just to ask for it. Just

to want it." The old man and the young man looked at each other. Past and future telescoped. "Now," Mike said. "Before dark."

Supper time, for the kids, was only twenty minutes long. When the girl in the brown dress with the bare blonde head got out of the shabby coupé, the gang was gathered again in its hollow under the oak. She went to them and sank down on the ground. "Ah, Freddy, was it Bones? Your dear little dog you wrote about in the essay?"

"Yes, Miss Dana." Freddie's voice was shrill and hostile. *I won't be touched!* it cried to her. So she said no more, but sat there on the ground, and presently she began to cry. There was contagion. The simplest thing in the world. First, one of the smaller ones, whimpering. Finally, Freddy Titus, bending over. Her arm guided his head, and then he lay weeping in her lap.

Russell, up in the summer house, closed his eyes and praised the Lord. In a little while he swung his legs over the railing and slid down the bank. "How do? I'm Mike Russell."

"I'm Lillian Dana." She was quick and intelligent, and her tears were real.

"Fellows," said Mike briskly, "you know what's got to be done, don't you? We've got to solve this case."

They turned their woeful faces.

He said, deliberately: "It's just the same as a murder. It is a murder."

"Yeah," said Freddy and sat up, tears drying. "And it was ole Matlin."

"Then we have to prove it."

Miss Lillian Dana saw the boy's face lock. He didn't need to prove anything, the look proclaimed. He knew. She leaned over a little and said: "But we can't make an ugly mistake and put it on Bones's account. Bones was a fine dog. Oh, that would be a terrible monument." Freddy's eyes turned, startled.

"It's up to us," said Mike gratefully, "to go after the real facts, with real detective work. For Bones's sake."

"It's the least we can do for him," said Miss Dana, calmly and decisively.

The Enemy

Freddy's face lifted.

"Trouble is," Russell went on quickly, "people get things wrong. Sometimes they don't remember straight. They make mistakes."

"Ole Matlin tells lies," said Freddy.

"If he does," said Russell cheerfully, "then we've got to *prove* that he does. Now, I've figured out a plan, if Miss Dana will help us. You pick a couple of the fellows, Fred. Have a go to all the houses around and ask some questions. Better pick the smartest ones. To find out the truth is very hard," he challenged.

"And then?" said Miss Dana in a fluttery voice.

"Then they, and you, if you will . . ."

"Me?" she straightened. "I am a schoolteacher, Mr. Russell. Won't the police . . .?"

"Not before dark."

"What are *you* going to be doing?"

"Dirtier work."

She bit her lip. "It's nose. It's . . . not done."

"No," he agreed. "You may lose your job."

She wasn't a bad-looking young woman. Her eyes were fine. Her brow was serious, but there was the ghost of a dimple in her cheek. Her hands moved. "Oh, well, I can always take up beauty culture or something. What are the questions?" She had a pad of paper and a pencil half out of her purse, and looked alert and efficient.

Now, as the gang huddled, there was a warm sense of conspiracy growing. "Going to be the dickens of a job," Russell warned them. And he outlined some questions. "Now, don't let anybody fool you into taking a sloppy answer," he concluded. "Ask how they know. Get real evidence. But don't go to Matlin's—I'll go there."

"I'm not afraid of him." Freddy's nostrils flared.

"I think I stand a better chance of getting the answers," said Russell coolly. "Aren't we after the answers?"

Freddy swallowed. "And if it turns out . . .?"

"It turns out the way it turns out," said Russell, rumpling the tow head. "Choose your henchmen. Tough, remember."

"Phil. Ernie." The kids who were left out wailed as the three small boys and their teacher, who wasn't a lot bigger, rose from the ground.

Charlotte Armstrong

"It'll be tough, Mr. Russell," Miss Dana said grimly. "Whoever you are, thank you for getting me into this."

"I'm just a stranger," he said gently, looking down at her face. "But you are a friend and a teacher." Pain crossed her eyes. "You'll be teaching now, you know."

Her chin went up. "O.K., kids. I'll keep the paper and pencil. Freddy, wipe your face. Stick your shirt in, Phil. Now, let's organise . . ."

It was nearly nine o'clock when the boys and the teacher, looking rather exhausted, came back to the Judge's house. Russell, whose face was grave, reached for the papers in her hands.

"Just a minute," said Miss Dana. "Judge, we have some questions."

Ernie Allen bared all his heap of teeth and stepped forward. "Did you see Bones to-day?" he asked with the firm skill of repetition. The Judge nodded. "How many times and when?"

"Once. Er . . . shortly before noon. He crossed my yard, going east."

The boys bent over the pad. Then Freddy's lips opened hard. "How do you know the time, Judge Kittinger?"

"Well," said the Judge, "hm . . . let me think. I was looking out the window for my company and just then he arrived."

"Five minutes of one, sir," Mike said.

Freddy flashed around. "What makes you sure?"

"I looked at my watch," said Russell. "I was taught to be exactly five minutes early when I'm asked to a meal." There was a nodding among the boys, and Miss Dana wrote on the pad.

"Then I was mistaken," said the Judge thoughtfully. "It was shortly before one. Of course."

Phil Bourchard took over. "Did you see anyone go into Matlin's drive-way or back lot?"

"I did not."

"Were you out of doors or did you look up that way?"

"Yes, I . . . When we left the table. Mike?"

"At two-thirty, sir."

The Enemy

"How do you know that time for sure?" asked Freddy Titus.

"Because I wondered if I could politely stay a little longer." Russell's eyes congratulated Miss Lillian Dana. She had made them a team, and on it, Freddy was the How-do-you-know-for-sure Department.

"Can you swear," continued Phil to the Judge, "there was nobody at all around Matlin's back lot then?"

"As far as my view goes," answered the Judge cautiously.

Freddy said promptly: "He couldn't see much. Too many trees. We can't count that."

They looked at Miss Dana and she marked on the pad. "Thank you. Now, you have a cook, sir? We must question her."

"This way," said the Judge, rising and bowing.

Russell looked after them and his eyes were velvet again. He met the Judge's twinkle. Then he sat down and ran an eye quickly over some of the sheets of paper, passing each on to his host.

Startled, he looked up. Lillian Dana, standing in the door, was watching his face.

"Do you think, Mike . . . ?"

A paper drooped in the Judge's hand.

"We can't stop," she challenged.

Russell nodded, and turned to the Judge. "May need some high brass, sir." The Judge rose. "And tell me, sir, where Matlin plays golf. And the telephone number of the Salvage League. No, Miss Dana, we can't stop. We'll take it where it turns."

"We must," she said.

It was nearly ten when the neighbours began to come in. The Judge greeted them soberly. The Chief of Police arrived. Mrs. Somers, looking grim and uprooted in a crêpe dress, came. Mr. Matlin, Mrs. Page, Mr. and Mrs. Daugherty, a Mr. and Mrs. Baker, and Diane Bourchard who was sixteen. They looked curiously at the tight little group, the boys and their blonde teacher.

Last of all to arrive was young Mr. Russell, who slipped in from the dark veranda, accepted the Judge's nod, and called the meeting to order.

Charlotte Armstrong

"We have been investigating the strange death of a dog," he began. "Chief Anderson, while we know your department would have done so in good time, we also know you are busy, and some of us," he glanced at the dark window pane, "couldn't wait. Will you help us now?"

The Chief said, genially: "That's why I'm here, I guess." It was the Judge and his stature that gave this meeting any standing. Naïve young, a little absurd it might have seemed had not the old man sat so quietly attentive among them.

"Thank you, sir. Now, all we want to know is what happened to the dog." Russell looked about him. "First, let us demolish the ramp." Mrs. Page's feathers ruffled. Russell smiled at her. "Mrs. Page saw a man go down Matlin's drive this morning. The Salvage League sent a truck to pick up rags and papers which at ten forty-two was parked in front of the Daughertys'. The man, who seemed poorly dressed in his working clothes, went to the tool room behind Matlin's garage, as he had been instructed to. He picked up a bundle and returned to his truck. Mrs. Page," purred Mike to her scarlet face, "the man was there. It was only your opinion about him that proves to have been, not a lie, but an error."

He turned his head. "Now, we have tried to trace the dog's day and we have done remarkably well, too." As he traced it for them, some faces began to wear at least the ghost of a smile, seeing the little dog frisking through the neighbourhood. "Just before one," Mike went on, "Bones ran across the Judge's yard to the Allens' where the kids were playing ball. Up to this time no one saw Bones *above* Greenwood Lane or *up* Hannibal Street. But Miss Diane Bourchard, recovering from a sore throat, was not in school today. After lunch, she sat on her porch directly across from Mr. Matlin's back lot. She was waiting for school to be out, when she expected her friends to come by.

"She saw, not Bones, but Corky, an animal belonging to Mr. Daugherty, playing in Matlin's lot at about two o'clock. I want your opinion. If poisoned bait had been lying there at two, would Corky have found it?"

"Seems so," said Daugherty. "Thank God Corky didn't." He bit his tongue. "Corky's a show dog," he blundered.

The Enemy

"But Bones," said Russell gently, "was more like a friend. That's why we care, of course."

"It's a damned shame!" Daugherty looked around angrily.

"It is," said Mrs. Baker. "He was a friend of mine, Bones was."

"Go on," growled Daugherty, "what else did you dig up?"

"Mr. Matlin left for his golf at eleven-thirty. Now, you see, it looks as if Matlin couldn't have left poison behind him."

"I most certainly did not," snapped Matlin. "I have said so. I will not stand for this sort of innuendo. I am not a liar. You said it was a conference . . ."

Mike held the man's eye. "We are simply trying to find out what happened to the dog," he said. Matlin fell silent.

"Surely you realise," purred Mike, "that, human frailty being what it is, there may have been other errors in what we were told this afternoon. There was at least one more."

"Mr. and Mrs. Baker," he continued, "worked in their garden this afternoon. Bones abandoned the ball game to visit the Bakers' dog, Smitty. At three o'clock, the Bakers, after discussing the time carefully, lest it be too late in the day, decided to bathe Smitty. When they caught him, for his ordeal, Bones was still there. . . . So, you see, Miss May Matlin, who says she saw Bones lying by the sidewalk *before three o'clock*, was mistaken."

Matlin twitched. Russell said sharply: "The testimony of the Bakers is extremely clear." The Bakers, who looked alike, both brown outdoor people, nodded vigorously.

"The time at which Mr. Matlin returned is quite well established. Diane saw him. Mrs. Daugherty, next door, decided to take a nap, at five after three. She had a roast to put in at four-thirty. Therefore, she is sure of the time. She went upstairs and from an upper window, she, too, saw Mr. Matlin come home. Both witnesses say he drove his car into the garage at three-ten, got out, and went around the building to the right of it—*on the weedy side*."

Mr. Matlin was sweating. His forehead was beaded. He did not speak.

Mike shifted papers. "Now, we know that the kids trooped up to Phil Bourchard's kitchen at about a quarter of three. Whereas Bones,

realising that Smitty was in for it, and shying away from soap and water like any sane dog, went up Hannibal Street at three o'clock sharp. He may have known in some doggy way where Freddy was. Can we see Bones loping up Hannibal Street, going *above* Greenwood Lane?"

"We can," said Daugherty. He was watching Matlin. "Besides, he was found above Greenwood Lane soon after."

"No one," said Mike slowly, "was seen in Matlin's back lot, except Matlin. Yet, almost immediately after Matlin was there, the little dog died."

"Didn't Diane . . . ?"

"Diane's friends came at three-twelve. Their evidence is not reliable." Diane blushed.

"This . . . this is intolerable!" croaked Matlin. "Why *my* back lot?"

Daugherty said: "There was no poison lying around my place, I'll tell you that."

"How do you know?" begged Matlin. And Freddy's eyes, with the smudges under them, followed to Russell's face. "Why not in the street? From some passing car?"

Mike said: "I'm afraid it's not likely. You see, Mr. Otis Carnavon was stalled at the corner of Hannibal and Lee. Trying to flag a push. Anything thrown from a car on that block, he ought to have seen."

"Was the poison quick?" demanded Daugherty. "What did he get?"

"It was quick. The dog could not go far after he got it. He got cyanide."

Matlin's shaking hand removed his glasses. They were wet.

"Some of you may be amateur photographers," Mike said. "Mr. Matlin, is there cyanide in your cellar dark-room?"

"Yes, but I keep it . . . most meticulously . . ." Matlin began to cough.

When the noise of his spasm died, Mike said: "The poison was embedded in ground meat which analysed, roughly, half-beef and the rest pork and veal, half and half." Matlin encircled his throat with his fingers. "I've checked with four neighbourhood butchers

The Enemy

and the dickens of a time I had," said Mike. No one smiled. Only Freddy looked up at him with solemn sympathy. "Ground meat was delivered to at least five houses in the vicinity. Meat that *was* one-half beef, one-quarter pork, one-quarter veal, was delivered at ten this morning to Matlin's house."

A stir like an angry wind blew over the room. The Chief of Police made some shift of his weight so that his chair creaked.

"It begins to look . . ." growled Daugherty.

"Now," said Russell sharply, "we must be very careful. One more thing. The meat had been seasoned."

"Seasoned!"

"With salt. And with . . . thyme."

"Thyme," groaned Matlin.

Freddy looked up at Miss Dana with bewildered eyes. She put her arm around him.

"As far as motives are concerned," said Mike quietly, "I can't discuss them. It is inconceivable to me that any man would poison a dog." Nobody spoke. "However, where are we?" Mike's voice seemed to catch Matlin just in time to keep him from falling off the chair. "We don't know yet what happened to the dog." Mike's voice rang. "Mr. Matlin, will you help us to the answer?"

Matlin said thickly, "Better get those kids out of here."

Miss Dana moved, but Russell said, "No. They have worked hard for the truth. They have earned it. And if it is to be had, they shall have it."

"You know?" whimpered Matlin.

Mike said, "I called your golf club. I've looked into your trash incinerator. Yes, I know. But I want you to tell us."

Daugherty said, "Well? Well?" And Matlin covered his face.

Mike said, gently, "I think there was an error. Mr. Matlin, I'm afraid, did poison the dog. But he never meant to, and he didn't know he had done it."

Matlin said, "I'm sorry . . . It's . . . I can't . . . She means to do her best. But she's a terrible cook. Somebody gave her those . . . those herbs. Thyme . . . thyme in everything. She fixed me a lunch box. I . . . couldn't stomach it. I bought my lunch at the club."

Mike nodded.

Matlin went on, his voice cracking. "I never . . . You see, I didn't even know it was meat the dog got. She said . . . she told me the dog was already dead."

"And of course," said Mike, "in your righteous wrath, you never paused to say to yourself, 'Wait, what *did* happen to the dog?'"

"Mr. Russell, I didn't lie. How could I know there was thyme in it? When I got home, I had to get rid of the hamburger she'd fixed for me—I didn't want to hurt her feelings. She tries . . . tries so hard . . ." He sat up suddenly. "*But what she tried to do to-day,*" he said, with his eyes almost out of his head, "*was to poison me!*" His bulging eyes roved. They came to Freddy. He gasped. He said, "Your dog saved my life!"

"Yes," said Mike quickly, "Freddy's dog saved your life. You see your step-daughter would have kept trying."

People drew in their breaths. "The buns are in your incinerator," Mike said. "She guessed what happened to the dog, went for the buns, and hid them. She was late, you remember, getting to the disturbance. And she did lie."

Chief Anderson rose.

"Her mother . . ." said Matlin frantically, "her mother . . ."

Mike Russell put his hand on the plump shoulder. "Her mother's been in torment, tortured by the rivalry between you. Don't you think her mother senses something wrong?"

Miss Lillian Dana wrapped Freddy in her arms. "Oh, what a wonderful dog Bones was!" She covered the sound of the other voices. "Even when he died, he saved a man's life. Oh, Freddy, he was a wonderful dog."

And Freddy, not quite taking everything in yet, was released to simple sorrow and wept quietly against his friend . . .

When they went to fetch May Matlin, she was not in the house. They found her in the Titus's back shed. She seemed to be looking for something.

Next day, when Mr. and Mrs. Titus came home, they found that although the little dog had died, their Freddy was all right. The Judge, Russell, and Miss Dana told them all about it.

The Enemy

Mrs. Titus wept. Mr. Titus swore. He wrung Russell's hand.

"... for stealing the gun ..." he babbled.

But the mother cried, "... for showing him, for teaching him. ...

Oh, Miss Dana, oh, my dear!"

The Judge waved from his veranda as the dark head and the blonde drove away.

"I think Miss Dana likes him," said Ernie Allen.

"How do you know for sure?" said Freddy Titus.

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